

31
S E R M O N S

PREACHED AT

2.L.e.

L I N C O L N ' S - I N N ,

Between the Years 1765 and 1776.

VOLUME THE THIRD.

By R I C H A R D H U R D , D. D.

Lord Bishop of LICHFIELD and COVENTRY,
and late Preacher of LINCOLN'S-INN.

L O N D O N ,

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S E R M O N I.

Preached May 19, 1776.

ISAIAH I. II.

Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks; Walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks which ye have kindled: This shall ye have of my hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow.

THE expression, we see, is figurative. By the *fire kindled*, and the *sparks*, with which men compass themselves about, may, indeed, be understood any of those worldly comforts, such as honours, riches, and pleasures, which the generality of men are studious to procure to themselves; and

in the *light* of which they love to walk, as being that, which, in their opinion, contributes most to warm, to chear, and illustrate human life.

The effect, however, of these comforts, is, that they who possess the largest share of them, and seek for no other, *lie down in sorrow*: that is, their lives are without joy, and their end is without hope. This is the recompense, which they receive from *the hand of God*; as might easily be shewn, if my purpose, at this time, were to enlarge on that common-place in morals, *the unsatisfactory nature of all earthly enjoyments*.

But my design is to engage your thoughts on a different argument, to which the letter of the text more directly leads us. For *light*, in all languages, is the emblem of knowledge; which is to the mind, what that is to the eye: And, the speaker in the text being God himself, we are naturally led to interpret that light, of *religious knowledge*; that genial fire, which, more than the Sun itself, is necessary to warm our spirits, and
guide

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guide our steps through the cold and dark passage of this life.

The question is, Whether we are to kindle this *fire*, for ourselves; or, whether we should not derive it, if we have it in our power so to do, immediately from heaven: Whether we shall do best to walk in the light of those few *sparks*, which our Reason is able to strike out for us, on the subject of religion; or, whether it will not be our interest, and should not be our choice, to take the benefit of that pure and steady flame, which Revelation holds out to us.

The text, in a severe, indignant irony, refers us to the former of these expedients, the better to excite our attention to the latter. *Walk*, says the Almighty, addressing himself to the idolaters of human reason, *Walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks which ye have kindled.* But to what end is this advice given? To one, they little dreamt of, and would surely avoid—*This ye shall have of my hand*, in recompence of all your speculations, *Ye shall lie down in sorrow.*

It seems, then, to be the purpose of the text, to inculcate this great truth, *That Revelation is the only sure and comfortable guide in matters of religion.* And, to second this purpose, so energetically expressed by the prophet, I would now shew you, that all the *sparks* of human knowlege, on this important subject, are but smoke; and all the *fire*, which human genius or industry can kindle at the altar of human reason, is itself; when compared with the light and heat of divine Revelation.

I SUPPOSE, that we are all convinced of what the voice of nature so loudly proclaims, that there is a God, a moral governor of the world; and that we are intimately related to him; and dependant upon him. The sum of our religious inquiries will then be

I. *What we are to do, in order to obtain the favour of that God: And*

II. *What that favour is, which, when we have done our best, we have to expect from him.*

Now,

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Now, it will be easy to shew, that the issue of our best reason, in the former of these enquiries, is suspense and doubt; and despair, or disappointment, in the latter. It will appear, that we cannot assure ourselves of the means, by which the favour of heaven is to be obtained; and that the highest degree of favour, we have a right to claim, is not that to which we aspire. So fated are we, when trusting to the faint, delusive light of our own minds, on this great, this only important subject, *to lie down in sorrow!*

I. To begin with the consideration of *what we are to do, in order to obtain the favour of God.*

That we are to *worship* God, will be allowed by all reasonable theists.

But in what way is he to be worshipped? By GIFTS AND OFFERINGS? So a great part of the world has believed. But, by *what* gifts and offerings, *how*, and *when*, and *where*, and by *whom* presented? Are *all* indifferent to him, and is no preference due to

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some above others? or, may not my offering lose its value, unless made in a certain *manner*? Is it of no moment with what *rites* I tender my gifts to God? Are all *seasons* equally fit; are all *places* equally pure; are all *persons* equally hallowed, for the oblation of them?

Or, again, are gifts and offerings, to the lord of all things, impertinent and vain? And is my reverence of him to be expressed by acts of SELF-DENIAL, PENANCE, and MORTIFICATION? So the pious of all times have very generally conceived. But by *what* penance, to what *end* referred, to what *degree* carried, and how *long* continued?

We may think of these questions, and of ourselves, what we will. But such questions, as these, have been asked by wise men: and, when those wise men had only to take council of their own reason, have rarely been answered to their satisfaction.

Or, let us advance a step further, and say that our dependance on God is to be signified, and his favour obtained, by PRAYER: that

gifts are mercenary, and penance servile ; both, a manifest affront to the all-sufficient and all-merciful Deity ; and that the supplications of a devout mind are the only incense fit for heaven. Be it so : Good and wise men have at all times thought highly of prayer ; and are generally agreed in recommending it as the most becoming expression of human piety. But here again, doubts and difficulties meet us. *How* are we to pray, and for *what* ?

Are all *forms* of address equally acceptable to him, we adore ? The Gentile world thought not : they were solicitous to petition their Gods in a certain style, and to gain their ear by some favourite appellation. Let this, again, pass for a scruple of superstition. Still, is it indifferent with what sentiments we approach the throne of God, and with what ideas of his nature and attributes we prostrate ourselves before him ? If those sentiments or ideas be not suited, in some degree, to the majesty of that great being, is there no danger that we may dishonour,

honour, may injure, may insult him by our addressees? May not our very prayers become affronts, and our praises, blasphemies?

And is it so easy to think justly on that mysterious subject, as that reason, every man's own reason, can instruct him? What if two or three divine men of the pagan world guessed right? Was their opinion any rule, was it even any authority, to the bulk of worshippers?

But say, that it was their own fault to misconceive of the Deity: still, for *what* shall they pray to him? For every thing, they want or wish? But thus, they would most commonly pray amiss, for what they should pray against, for what would corrupt and hurt them.

“What this or that philosopher delivered, was but a saying of his. Mankind might hearken to it, or reject it, as they pleased; or, as it suited their interest, passions, principles, or humours. They were under no obligation; the opinion of this, or that philosopher, was of no authority.” LOCKE. V. II. p. 578. fol. Lond. 1759.

These

These difficulties, with regard both to the mode and matter of this duty, appeared so great to the old masters of wisdom, that some ^b of them thought it the highest effort of human wit, to form a reasonable prayer; and others supposed that none but God himself could instruct man how to do it ^c.

There is a way, indeed, to cut these difficulties short; which is, by maintaining, as some ^d have done, that prayer is no duty at all; but a vain superfluous observance, justly ranked with the other fancies of superstition: that God is not honoured by any external, no, nor by any mental, applications to him: that a good conscience ^e is true piety, and a spotless life, the only religion.

Admit this exalted idea of divine worship; yet, where shall we find, among the sons of Adam, one such worshipper? Who shall

^b The Stoics. 'Ο σοφὸς—μόνος εἰδὼς εὐχασθαι. See Casaub. ad Sat. 11. Persii.

^c Plato. Alcib. 11.

^d The Epicureans of old and modern times.

^e —incoctum generoso pectus honesto.

Persius,

lay claim to that conscience, or this life? Where is the man, that passes a single day, an hour almost, without doing that which he ought not to do, or omitting somewhat he ought to have done? And what multitudes are there, who cover themselves with infamy, and with crimes?

And what shall the trembling mind do, when it looks up, as at times it cannot help doing, to that God, who *is of purer eyes, than to behold iniquity?*

Repent, it will be said: that species of piety is all-powerful with heaven; it can efface sin, and restore tranquillity.

Here, again, the general sense of mankind runs another way. For, if it be so clear, that repentance alone has this virtue, how came the idea of atonement and expiation into the world? and whence the almost universal practice of *propitiatory sacrifices?*

It is easy, no doubt, to brand this disposition of the human mind, as so many others, with the opprobrious name of superstition.

S E R M O N I. 11

perftition. Let us fee, then, what the merits and claims are, of *Repentance itfelf*.

A man offends againft God, and the fenfe of his own mind. On reflexion (what can he do lefs?) he repents; and (if it pleafe God) is forgiven. But paffion revives; he offends again, and repents again; and fo goes on, through his whole life, in a courfe of alternate tranfgreffion, and repentance. And is this all the claim he has to be received, at length, into the favour of God, that he never finned, though he did it every day, but he was forry for it?

Yes, you will fay, *If my brother trefpafs againft me feven times in a day, and feven times in a day turn again and repent, I am bound by the law of Chrift himfelf to forgive him*^f. And will God be lefs placable, than his creature man is required to be^g?

This rule of conduct is very fit to be obferved by one offender towards another: but

^f Luke, xvii. 4.

^g See this argument urged by Mr. Locke, V. II. p. 574. fol. Lond. 1759.

is it past a doubt that it will, that it must take place between God and man? WE are bound to this repeated, this continual forgiveness of others, by a sense of our common infirmities. HE has a government to support; of what extent, over what worlds, and how connected with this, no man may say: And what would become of government in this world, if every convict was to be pardoned on repentance?

Nor is it enough to reply, that human governors cannot pronounce on the sincerity of such repentance. If they could, they would certainly not regulate their proceedings by that consideration. The law has denounced a penalty on such a crime: And the public interest requires that the penalty, for example-sake, be inflicted.

Something, like this, may be true of God's moral government. No man can say, it is not. And therefore repentance, as plausible as its plea may appear, can never free the guilty mind from all apprehension.

But

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But another dreadful circumstance attends this matter. We often satisfy ourselves, that we repent of a past crime: Yet we commit that crime again; perhaps the very next hour. Can we call that repentance sincere? Or, have we a right to conclude that God, who sees through all the prevarication and duplicity of our hearts, must accept such repentance, on our profession of it? Let what virtue there will be in repentance, when seen by the unerring eye of God to be true and unfeigned, how shall man reckon on the efficacy of it, when he may so easily mistake, and cannot certainly know the real worth and character of what he calls repentance?

Here then, whether we consider what the moral attributes of the Deity, and his righteous government, may demand; or whether we regard the weakness and inefficacy of our best purposes; there is room enough for the terrors of religion to invade and possess the mind, in spite of all that Reason

Reason can do to repell, or dislodge them from it.

After all, in contemplation of that infinite mercy which furrounds the throne of God, and of the infirmity incident to frail man, I am willing to suppose (as it is our common interest to do) that *repentance*, at all times, and how oft soever renewed, is a ground, on which he may reasonably build fair hopes and chearful expectations. To repent, is always the best thing we can do: It is always a conduct right in itself; and, as such, is intitled, we will say, on the principles of natural religion, to the divine acceptance.

But what does that ACCEPTANCE import? *The reward of eternal life? A remission of all punishment? or, only an abatement of it?* Here, again, fresh difficulties start up, and come to be considered,

II. Under the second general head of this discourse; in which it was proposed to inquire, *What that favour is, which, when we have done our best to recommend ourselves to God, we have reason to expect at his hands?*

1. If

1. If presumptuous man could learn to estimate himself at his true worth, he might perhaps see reason to conclude, that his highest moral merit can pretend to no more, than to some *abatement* of present or future punishment.

Let him calculate how oft, how knowingly, how willfully he hath offended; and, on the other hand, when he did his duty, how coldly, how remissly, how reluctantly he did it: with what a gust of passion he disobeyed; and with what indifference he repented: with how full a consent of his mind, with what deliberation, and against what conviction, he sinned; and then, again, with what hesitation, by what degrees, in what circumstances, and upon what motives, he recovered himself from any bad habit: In a word, how full and complete and contagious his vices have been; and how faint and partial and ineffective, his best virtues: Let him, I say, calculate all this, and then tell us where is the stock of merit, on the balance of the account, that should encourage

encourage him to do more than hope that some part of the punishment, he hath justly incurred, may by a merciful judge be struck off, in consideration of his virtues? If such a man recovered his health, when he left his intemperance; or his credit in the world, when he shook hands with his injustice; or, if his penitence could avail so far as to shorten the term, or qualify the rigour, of his sufferings in some other state of being, would he not have reason to think he had all the recompense he deserved? Could most men, at least, on a strict scrutiny of their hearts and lives, carry their pretensions higher? But,

2. Let us be indulgent to human virtue, and suppose it pure and active enough to work out all the guilt, which vice had contracted, could it do more than cancel the punishment, due to vice, and should we be authorized to expect more than a *full remission* of it? Suppose, that after a long life, checquered with good and bad actions, but in such sort as that the good equalled the bad,

bad, and perfectly atoned for them (and which of us will say, that this is not a favourable supposition?); suppose, I say, that after such a life, as this, the whole man were suffered to fall into a state of insensibility, that all his powers and faculties were suspended, or the man himself utterly extinguished, could we complain of this allotment, or could reason pretend that it was not according to the rules of strict justice?

3. Still I agree to make a further concession to the pride of Virtue. Let the moral qualities of some men be so excellent, and the tenour of their lives so pure, as to entitle them to a *positive reward* from the great searcher of hearts and inspector of human actions: would not the daily blessings of this life be a suitable recompense for such desert; would not health, and prosperity, and reputation, and peace of mind, be an adequate return for their best services? Or, if all this did not satisfy their claims, could they require more than such a portion

of happiness in a future state, as should correspond to their merits, and make them full amends for all the sacrifices they here made to Conscience and to Virtue? And might not a small degree of such happiness, and for a short term, be an equivalent for such sacrifices? Could they dream of living *for ever*, and of living *happily* for ever in heaven; and call such a reward, as this, a debt, a claim of right, which could not justly be withheld from them? Could any man in his senses pretend, even to himself, that a Virtue of sixty or seventy years, though ever so perfect, ever so constant, deserved immortal life in bliss and glory? Incredible: impossible: the merit and the recompense are too widely disjoined, the disproportion between them is too vast, to give the least colour of reason to such expectations. A Saint, or a Martyr, has no claim of right to so immense a reward, so transcendant a felicity.

'Tis true, Christianity gives us these hopes, which Reason forwardly assumes,
and

and makes her own ; forgetting at the same time, or unthankfully slighting the only grounds, on which they are founded. For, though eternal life be promised to favoured man in the Gospel, it is there promised to him, not as a debt, but as a free gift ; and that, not in consideration of his good works, but of his faith in Jesus.

See then, to what the hopes of nature, the conclusions of reason and philosophy, amount, on this interesting subject. We are in the hands of an all-wise and all-righteous God, and are undone without his favour. Yet how that favour is to be obtained, we know not ; or, if we do know, we are unable of ourselves to obtain it in the degree, we wish, and to the ends, for which we aspire to it. Our best speculations on the *means* of propitiating heaven, are mixed with uncertainty ; and our best *hopes* dashed with mistrust and suspicion. For what man is so righteous, as to have perfect confidence in his own good works ; or, so sanguine, as to think Heaven, the due reward

of them? And yet will any thing, short of this, content our impatient desires? Should our virtues merit no more than some abatement of future misery, so justly due to our innumerable ill deserts, how sad a prospect have we before us? or, if they do but free us from punishment, what man is so abject as not to shudder at the thought of extinction or insensibility? or, lastly, if they supply some faint hope of future reward, what generous man but wishes more to himself, than a slight, a precarious, and short-lived happiness; beyond which, as we have seen, he has no right to extend his expectations?

If the Gentiles, who had only the light of nature to conduct them, had no way to get quit of these doubts and fears, their condition was certainly unhappy, but would bespeak the mercy of God: their disadvantages and distresses would be allowed for, and considered by him. But for those, who have now the light of heaven shining about them, and yet chuse to walk in the dim, disastrous twilight of their own

own reason, what must be their folly, as well as misery? I say, their *misery*. For this last is no secret to observing men, notwithstanding the airs of gaiety and satisfaction, they sometimes assume; and indeed deserves the tenderest pity, though their perverse *folly* be apt to excite a different passion.

But to conclude: It is enough to have shewn, in justification of the sacred text, that they who *walk in the light of their own fire, and in the sparks which they have kindled*, have this recompense of their choice, allotted to them by the hand of God, and the nature of things, *That they do and must lie down in sorrow*.

To You, who have determined more wisely to govern yourselves by faith, and not by Reason only; who rejoice to walk in the clear sun-shine of the blessed Gospel, and not in the malignant light of philosophical speculation, To you, I say, the reward of your better conduct, is, that ye know how to recommend yourselves to

the favour of God; and ye know what to expect from that favour: Ye understand that, by FAITH and REPENTANCE, ye have peace of mind in this transitory life, and assured hopes of immortal unspeakable felicity, reserved for you in the heavens.

SERMON

S E R M O N II.

Preached Nov. 15, 1767.

2. COR. iv. 3.

If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.

THE text implies, that the evidence, with which Christianity is attended, may fail of convincing the minds of some men. And indeed from the time that *the Sun of righteousness* rose upon the earth, there have always been those, who could not, or would not, be enlightened by Him.

Now it might be a question, whether this effect were owing to the nature of the evidence itself, or to some obscurity in the

manner of proposing it, This, I say, might have been a question, even among Christians themselves, if the Apostle had not determined it to our hands. He, who was fully instructed in the truths of the Gospel, knew the evidence, with which they were accompanied, was enlightened by the same spirit that had inspired them, and had great experience in the different tempers and capacities of men, roundly asserts that Infidelity has no countenance, either from within or without, neither from the sort or degree of evidence, by which the Christian Revelation is supported, nor from any mysterious conveyance of it; but that, universally, the fault lies in those, who do not receive it. *If the Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: to those, who would not be convinced by any evidence whatsoever.*

What the evidences of Christianity, in fact, are, and how abundantly sufficient for the conviction of all reasonable men, I shall not now enquire. The subject is fitter for a volume, than a discourse in this place.

Let it be supposed, on St. Paul's authority, that those evidences are sufficient: still ye may be curious to know, and it may tend to the establishment of your faith to understand, how it has come to pass, that so much light could be resisted.

To this question, a pertinent answer has been given from the prejudices and passions, from the vices and corruptions of unbelievers; it being no new thing that men should *love darkness rather than light*, when *their deeds are*, and when they have resolved with themselves they shall be, *evil*^a. For, as our Lord himself argues in this case, *Every one that doth evil, hateth the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd: But he that doth the Truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be manifested, that they are wrought in God*^b.

But then it has been replied, that, though Vice may be many times the ground of infidelity, and the condemnation of such men

^a John iii. 19.

^b Ibid. 20, 21.

be just, yet that some, too, have disbelieved from no such motives ; that the Gospel has been rejected by persons, who appear to have been men of large and liberal minds, as free, as others, from all perverse prejudices, and as little subject to any gross vice or passion : Nay, that, in the class of unbelievers, there have been those who have distinguished themselves as much by the purity of their lives, as the brightness of their understandings.

All this may be true ; and yet our Saviour affirms, *that he, who believeth not, is condemned already*^c : and St. Paul in the text, to the same purpose, *that if the Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost*. There must needs, then, be some latent cause of this strange fact ; some secret depravity lurking in the mind of those, who disbelieve the Gospel, though appearances be thus fair and flattering. And, though Christian Charity be not forward *to think evil* of his neighbour,

^c John iii. 18.

yet in this case we have reason to suspect it: and what we suspect, we may perhaps find, in a vice, so secret and insinuating, that it creeps upon men unawares; so congenial, as it were, to our depraved nature, that hardly any man can be sure of his being wholly free from it; and so ingenious in disguising itself, as to pass upon others, nay upon the man possessed by it, for one of his best qualities.

By these characters, ye will easily see I speak of self-love, or rather the vicious exertion of it in what we call, PRIDE: A vice, which may as fatally obstruct our pursuit of Truth, as any the most vulgar immorality; and the rather, because it is not easily suspected or acknowledged by us,

This vice then it may be, that *hides the Gospel from those* better sort of men, *to whom it is hid.* They had need examine themselves well, for it assumes, as I said, the most imposing forms. Who would look for it, in the cultivation of his mind, and the love of Virtue? Yet in either of these,
it

it may lie concealed: and an inquirer into the truth of the most rational, and the purest of all religions may be prejudiced against it by a double Pride, by the PRIDE OF REASON, and the PRIDE OF VIRTUE.

I. FIRST, *Infidelity may proceed from the Pride of Reason.*

When it pleased God to bestow the faculty of Reason on his creature, Man, he intended that this substitute of himself should be the guide of life, and the hand-maid of Religion. And that it might serve to these purposes, it was made sagacious enough, if honestly exerted, to lead him to some competent knowledge of his maker, and of his moral duty, and to judge of the pretensions of any further light from heaven, which might be graciously vouchsafed to him.

Man, proud of this free Gift, was in haste to make trial of its strength; and finding it could do something, too easily concluded it could do every thing. Yet its weakness soon appeared; first, in man's transgression,

transgression, and consequent forfeiture of another free Gift, that of immortality; and next, in the portentous errors he fell into, both in respect of virtue and religion. For God, who had graciously intended for him, in due time, another and safer guide, to prepare him for the reception of it, and to convince him, in the mean time, how much it was wanted, had suffered him to abuse this, to the worst purposes, of immorality, and idolatry; by both which the earth was generally overspread for many ages, and even in the most enlightened times, notwithstanding his Reason might, and should have taught him better.

But God's wisdom and goodness foresaw this abuse, and provided, from the first, for the correction of it. He had signified his purpose from the moment of man's transgression, and afterwards by a gradual opening of his scheme, in many successive revelations; all terminating in that universal redemption of mankind by the sacrifice, and through the Gospel, of his Son. This last and greatest instance

instance of the divine love for man, it might be expected, after so much experience of his own debility and folly, he would gladly and thankfully receive; and, that he might be qualified to discern the hand of God from the practices of fallible and designing men, was one main end, as I said, which God designed in lighting up the lamp of Reason in him.

But now this boasted Guide, though found to be poor and weak, grew proud and presumptuous. It would not only judge of the credentials of divine Revelation (which was its proper office, and without which faculty of judging there could be no security from the endless impostures of fanaticism and superstition, but not content with this power) it would decide peremptorily on the nature and fitness of such Revelation itself; and would either admit none, or such only, as it should perfectly comprehend.

Here, then, Reason forgot its own use, and power: its use, which was to bring him to the acknowledgement of a divine Religion; and its power, which did not
enable

enable him to judge of the infinite counsels of God, but to try whether any such were revealed to him. In a word, he forgot that his utmost capacity extended no farther than just to see whether the proposed Revelation were such as might come from God, as contradicting no clear and certain principles of reason, and whether the evidences were such as proved that it did so. If it contained nothing repugnant to right Reason, that is, to a prior light derived from the same source of Truth, it might come from heaven; if the attestations of it were clear and convincing, it must proceed from that quarter. To try its credibility and authority, was then within the province of Reason: to determine of its absolute necessity and fitness, and to explore the depth and height of those counsels, on which it is framed, was above its reach and comprehension.

Yet Reason assumed to herself, too generally, this latter office; and this I call, the **PRIDE** of Reason. Hence all its wanderings and miscarriages; from this perverse application

cation of its powers arose all the heresies that have distracted the Christian Church, and all the infidel systems that have laboured to overthrow it. In both cases, men would be wise *above, or against, what was written.*

Of the Heresies, I have nothing to say at this time. They appear at large in the ecclesiastical historian. Of the dreams of infidelity, as arising from the fumes of pride, so much is to be said, as my present subject requires of me, but this in as few words as possible.

The pride of Reason has then pronounced (as it operated at different times, and on different tempers), that Revelation is unnecessary, because Reason could see and discover by its own light all that was needful to our direction and happiness—that, if it were wanted by us, it was impossible to be given consistently with the laws of nature and experience—that as to that pretended scheme of Revelation, called the Gospel, its morality indeed was pure enough, but that it carried no other internal marks of its divinity:

divinity: that its doctrines were such as Reason would not expect, and in many cases could not understand: that it talked of divine things in a manner that was strange and extraordinary; of a purpose to redeem mankind which, if it were needful at all, might have been effected by more rational and less operose methods; and to save and sanctify them by such means as seemed fanciful and delusive: that the divine nature was spoken of in high mysterious terms, which puzzle and confound our Metaphysics; and that the offices, in which the Godhead was employed, are either degrading, or such as imply an immoderate and inconceivable condescension.

And what then, say others, is the basis on which this incredible Revelation rests? Why on *Miracles*, which we cannot admit, as being violations or suspensions of those laws, by which we know the Supreme Being governs the world; and on *Prophecies*, which may have been feigned, as many have been, or which imply such a prescience in

the Deity of free contingent events, as is perhaps impossible. If the Gospel then is to be admitted as a truly divine Revelation, convince us, that its external proofs are above all doubt and suspicion; and that all its internal characters are such as lie open to the perfect scrutiny, and entire investigation of our faculties.

Thus does the Pride of Reason vaunt itself, against Reason. For, if to all or any of these objections (on which so many infidel systems hang) we should only say, *that they are nothing to the purpose*, what could the objectors reply to us? If pressed closely, they could only take refuge in this principle, *that no Religion can be divine, all the reasons of which are not fully known to us*; a principle, for which they have surely no warrant from right Reason. How do they know what is necessary, or fit, or right, with regard to the divine dispensations, I mean (which is the case here) when they only silence, not contradict our Reason? Every thing may be fit and right, and
might

might appear to be so, if the whole scheme of providence were fully unveiled to us. It must be fit and right, whether we see it or no, if the Religion in question be credibly attested: And the credibility will depend not on our fancies, or expectations of I know not what irresistible evidence (which it might be best and wisest not to give) but on the real moment of the arguments, on which it is established.

So that the last effort of Infidelity is only an appeal to the ignorance of mankind; which proves nothing but the necessity of a long-forgotten virtue, Modesty, in our researches into Religion.

We see then how the *Pride of Reason* has betrayed presumptuous men into a disbelief of Revelation, and how true it is that, *if the Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost*, as well by *this* means, as by any other.

II. But, secondly, there is A PRIDE OF VIRTUE, as well as of Reason: and by this Pride, too (such is the infirmity of

our common nature) *the Gospel may be hid from us.*

On whatever foundation a man chuses to build his moral system, he easily convinces himself of the worth and excellence of moral action. The reasonableness, the utility, and the beauty of Virtue are so conspicuous, that even the vicious eye it with respect, and the virtuous easily grow enamoured of it. Thus it came to be among the extravagancies of the Stoics, its best friends in the pagan world, that Virtue was not only the perfection of man's nature, but that it raised him, in some sense, above the Divine^d. And to make their arrogant system all of a piece, they further maintained that this super-celestial Virtue, in which they gloried, was their own proper acquisition; that they derived it wholly from themselves, and that God did not, and could not give it^e.

^d Ferte fortiter: hoc est, quo Deum anteceditis: Ille extra patientiam malorum est, vos supra patientiam. *Sen. de Prov. c. vi.*

^e *Cic. Nat. Deor. iii. 36.*

This, you will say, was stoical pride ; but it is, too commonly, also, the pride of Virtue, of whatever denomination. Penetrated with a lively sense of its use and excellence, virtuous men, especially of a certain temperament, take fire from their own heated ideas, and flame out into a kind of moral fanaticism. They consider Virtue, as the supreme and only good, absolute in itself, and independant of any other. They exalt and deify themselves in their own imaginations ; and, though their language may be more decent, the sense of their hearts is truly stoical.

See, now, whether Virtue, under this intoxication, be in a condition to benefit by the sober truths of the Gospel. It finds there a frightful picture of the moral world ; much is said concerning the weakness and inefficacy of moral virtue. This representation, of itself, is disgusting. But one great design of the Gospel was to reform this state of things : And thus far is well : But by what means would it reform it ? Why,

among others, by Faith, and Hope. Yet, in Faith, the proud moralist sees no Virtue, at all; and Hope, in his ideas, degrades and fervilizes his adored Virtue. The Gospel proposes to save us by the sacrifice of Christ: But He acknowledges no need of any sacrifice; relies, with confidence, on his own merits; and disdains the notion of an intercessor. He holds, that nothing more could be intended by a Revelation, if such were given, than the promotion of our Virtue; and that we want not its aid, for that purpose: that we read our duty in the sense of our own minds; which Reason enforces in as high terms, as the Gospel, in a more engaging way, and on principles more sublime and generous.

Above all, the Gospel speaks much of the succours of Grace, as necessary to infuse and to confirm our Virtue; a language, which the *Pride* of Virtue will not understand: And of a Heaven, and a Hell; by which if any thing more be meant than the proper natural effects of Virtue and Vice itself, the
idea

idea is rejected, as superfluous and even childish.

To such an extreme of folly, and even impiety, may the Pride of Virtue carry us; and so fatally may *the Gospel be hid from those*, whom this last infirmity of human nature blinds by its specious illusions! And that this is no ideal picture, but one taken from the life, will appear to those who know any thing of human nature; and of the perverse prejudices, by which some ingenious, and otherwise virtuous men, have suffered themselves to be misled in their religious inquiries^f.

Enough has been said to shew the issue of Intellectual and Moral *Pride*: And how it comes to pass that men *lose* themselves, who reason, on Religion, without modesty, or would be virtuous without Religion.

The Application is short, but striking. It is, That men should examine them-

^f Lord Shaftesbury, and others.

selves well, before they presume to think lightly of the Gospel. They may learn to suspect the power and influence of their grosser passions, when they see that even these refined ones may corrupt their judgment, and betray them into Infidelity.

The Apostle says expressly, that *if the Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost*: and who, that rejects the Gospel, but must tremble for himself, when his REASON, nay his VIRTUE, may be the instrument of his ruin?

SERMON

S E R M O N III.

Preached Nov. 13, 1774.

I PETER iii. 15.

— *Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh You a reason of the hope, that is in You, with meekness and fear.*

THESE words have been often and justly quoted to prove the rational genius of our religion : but they have sometimes been quoted to prove much more, “ The obligation, that Christians are under, “ to justify their religion, in the way of argument, against all opposers, and to satisfy all the difficulties and objections, “ that can be brought against it.” A magnificent

nificent pretension ! but surely without authority from the text, as I shall briefly shew by enquiring,

1. Who the persons are, to whom this direction is given :
2. What that *hope* is, *which is in them*, and concerning which they are supposed to be interrogated : And therefore
3. Lastly, what the proper *answer*, or apology must be, of those persons, when required to give a reason of such hope.

The resolution of these questions will afford us a clear insight into the meaning of the text : and then we shall be enabled to make some pertinent and useful reflexions upon it.

1. St. Peter addresses himself to *the elect strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bythinia*—i. e. most probably, to Jewish Christians, dispersed through these countries, in which they were properly *strangers* ; though, in some sense, all good men are strangers and sojourners on earth,

earth, and therefore the use of this term may not necessarily exclude such Heathen converts to the faith, as lived in those quarters. But whatever be the precise meaning of the term, it is clear, that all persons of this general denomination, or all the *stranger* Christians, residing in the places, here mentioned, are, without distinction, concerned in this catholic epistle. There is not a word that implies any difference of age, or sex, or education, or rank : not the least regard is had to the office of some, or the qualifications of others : all indiscriminately, of the class specified, who had knowledge and understanding enough to profess themselves Christians, are the objects of the Apostle's address ; and of these, universally, is the requisition made, that they *be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh a reason of the hope that is in them.* But what then

2. Is that *Hope*, of which all such persons were expected and required to render a reason ? Plainly the general hope of Christians,

tians; the hope of eternal life, the hope of a resurrection from the dead, the blessed hope, in short, of salvation through Jesus Christ.

The context shews, that it was this hope, and this only, of which they were to give an account. For, in the preceding verse, the Apostle had been speaking of the trials which they should undergo for the sake of their religion. Possibly, they were, then, in a state of persecution; or, it was foreseen that they soon would be in that state. *But and if ye suffer, says he, for righteousness sake, happy are ye.* Why? because they knew the hope of their calling, and the ample recompense that would be made them in a future life for all such sufferings. Therefore, he advises that they should always have this precious hope present to them, and well established in their minds: nay, and that, for their own better support in the midst of their sufferings, and for the vindication of themselves to others, their persecutors, perhaps, who might ask on what

what grounds they exposed themselves to such torments, they should have in readiness an *answer*, or apology for their own conduct, setting forth the reason they had to confide in that hope; from which reason it would appear that they acted, as became prudent men, and not as blind, frantic enthusiasts.

It being now seen, to whom the text is directed, and what the *hope*, under consideration, is, we have no difficulty in answering

3. The last question, "What the proper *answer* might, or rather must be, of such persons, when required to give a reason of such hope?"

For what other answer could they give (and this they all might give), than that their Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, by whom they had been encouraged to entertain this hope, had shewn himself well able to make it good by his own resurrection? They might say, in the words of the Apostle Paul (who apologized for himself to the Athenians,

in

in like circumstances), We therefore think ourselves happy in suffering for righteousness sake,—*because God hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead^a.*

This was an obvious reason of the *hope*, *that was in them*, and level to all capacities. It was, also, a sufficient reason, if it was any at all, that is, if the fact alledged be true; and, that it was so, they might appeal to the testimony of those, who had seen the Lord and conversed with him, after his resurrection; nay, whom themselves had seen confirming that testimony *by signs and wonders*, done in the name of Jesus.

We see, then, what is the true and full meaning of the text. The Apostle exhorts those, to whom he writes, all of them, the simpler, as well as more informed, to bear in mind the end of their religion, EVER-

^a Acts xvii. 31.

LASTING LIFE; and the grounds, on which they expected it, the WORD of their divine MASTER, *confirmed to them by them that beared him*^b, and by his rising from the dead.

And now we are at liberty to make some reflexions on the text, which may be useful and instructive to us.

And, first, I observe, as most others have done, that Christians are allowed and encouraged to reason on the subject of their religion, and to build their faith on conviction. For the Apostle's advice is, not to decline the way of argument, but to use such arguments as are cogent and satisfactory. And in this free exercise of the understanding, which is permitted, or rather enjoined to all Christians, the manly genius of our religion is seen, and by it is distinguished from that of every blind and servile superstition. But then,

Secondly, I observe, that this work of reason is enjoined, only, with regard to *the hope, that is in us*, that is, to the end and

^b Heb. ii. 3.

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scope of Christianity, and to the authority on which it rests ; in other words, with regard to the EVIDENCES of this Religion.

It is true, these evidences are a different thing to different persons, according to their respective situations. To the primitive Christians, such as those to whom the exhortation of the text is addressed, it was evidence sufficient, “ That they had the
 “ great facts of the Gospel, especially that
 “ decisive fact, the resurrection of Christ,
 “ reported to them by persons, who had
 “ been eye-witnesses of those extraordinary
 “ transactions, or, who had heard them,
 “ at least, from eye-witnesses, and were
 “ endowed, besides, with the power of
 “ working miracles in confirmation of their
 “ testimony.” For in those days, it is to be observed, they, who were commissioned to plant the Gospel in the world, *went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following* °.

° Mark xvi. 20.

This

This state of things continued through what is called the apostolic age, and perhaps longer, during which time it was easy for the plainest Christian to give such an *answer* to those who required a reason of *the hope that was in him*, as was perfectly satisfactory. But, when the Gospels were admitted by the faithful, as authentic accounts of their Master's history and doctrine, and when the Apostles had further drawn out and explained the principles and proofs of Christianity in their several writings, that is, when the canon of the new testament was completed, and generally received, as such (all which was done within the first century from the Christian æra), Then the appeal lay to these scriptures, and the ground of a Christian's persuasion was, the authority of the inspired writers. And now, if believers were asked the reason of *the hope that was in them*, the answer was, "That so it was written in books, which were in all hands, and allowed by all to contain nothing but infallible truth." Nor could the force of

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this answer be disputed, when the memory of certain facts was recent, when the places where, and the persons to whom, or for whose use the sacred books were written, could be pointed out, and when the writers of them were known, by the miracles wrought by them, to have been under the direction of the Holy Ghost.

On the conviction, which this apology carried with it, the world became Christian. But in process of time, and after a course of many ages, it might be doubted whether those books had been transmitted pure and uncorrupted. And under these circumstances the *answer*, being somewhat enlarged, stands thus : “ That the hope of a
“ Christian is founded on the authority of
“ the sacred canon, composed by inspired
“ men, as was universally allowed in the
“ first ages of Christianity, and not materi-
“ ally altered, as we have reason to believe,
“ to this day.”

The answer given in these three periods, is, you see, very general, because the
question

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question is, on what grounds of reason a plain man could justify his profession of Christianity: and the answer, in each case, is a proper one, and of real weight. But the answer of knowing and skillful men is more particular, may indeed be infinitely varied and extended according to the abilities of the answerer; and, from such minute, and laboured apologies much additional light and conviction hath been derived. Still you see the subject of inquiry, is, the EVIDENCES of Christianity, how different soever in different ages, and in the view of different persons in the same age. All that unbelievers have a right to ask, is, on what grounds we affirm the truth and divinity of our religion: and the sole duty which the text imposes upon us, is to satisfy that question. Their curiosity, and our labour, should not, at least needs not, be extended beyond those bounds. But

Thirdly, what if inquisitive men should go farther, and, when they have set forth the evidences of Christianity to their own sa-

tisfaction, and that of others, should proceed to give us a *rationale* of its doctrines: Would not their pains be useful, as tending very much to promote the honour of our divine religion?

Perhaps, they might, if *soberly* employed, and if inquirers would set out with a resolution of stopping in their curious researches, when they had no ideas, or no clear or distinct ones.

But, even with this restriction, *two* things are, further, to be observed. ONE is, that no Christian is bound to make this solicitous inquiry into the doctrinal, no, nor into the moral part of the Gospel. It is enough that his faith and life be regulated by its doctrines and precepts, whether he do, or do not, see the grounds in reason, on which they stand. Nay, possibly his conduct is then most acceptable, when he looks no farther than to the authority of the Gospel; agreeably to that well-known decision of our Lord himself—*blessed is he, who hath not seen, and yet hath believed*: not, that he expects any
man

man to believe or to obey him, without reason: but he most approves the ingenuous turn of that man's mind, who admits his divine mission, on a sufficient indeed, but not the highest, degree of evidence; and much more, therefore, who yields obedience to his laws, acknowledged on such evidence to be divine, without inquiring further into the reasons of them. Indeed, to what purpose do I scrupulously ask a reason of that, which I already know to be just and fit, because reasonably admitted to proceed from divine authority?

The OTHER observation I would make, is, That, if after the most diligent inquiry, we should not, yet, be able to penetrate the reasons of many things, or to give ourselves entire satisfaction about them, this unacceptable experience should not in the least affect our belief and esteem of the Gospel. For all that follows from such disappointed curiosity is only this, That we are weak and blind; and not that the things themselves are either false or unreasonable. Our duty,

therefore, is to confide in the *revealed word*; not questioning its authority, or torturing its language; but accepting with thankfulness, what we do understand, and with reverence, what we do not.

When these two conditions are inviolably observed, the way of minute inquiry into the doctrines of Christianity, so far forth as they are the objects of inquiry, at all, may be usefully and commendably employed. For then none but men of leisure and ability will think themselves concerned in making such inquiry: and even these, if they should not obtain all the satisfaction they propose to themselves, will neither attempt to disturb the faith of others, nor suffer their own faith to be disturbed by their curious speculations. Still: when learned men are taken up in those profound inquiries, and seem most confident that they have penetrated far into the reasons of many things which are kept secret from others, they should especially remember (and that is the Fourth,

Fourth, and *last* observation I shall make on the text), to present their *answer* or apology to mankind, *with meekness and fear*.

1. With MEEKNESS, or a soft and gentle spirit, breathing in words, neither passionate, nor assuming; that so they may gain as many, and exasperate as few, as they can. This was a caution more than commonly necessary to the first apologists for Christianity who had to plead its cause at the tribunal of Kings, at that time, their enemies and persecutors. But the rule is always a good one to be observed by the advocates of the Gospel, who never serve it better, than when its prime virtue, CHARITY, corrects, or rather consecrates, their zeal.

2. The *reason of the hope, that is in them*, should, also, be given *with FEAR*: that is, not only with a *fear* of giving needless offence to those, to whom they address their apology, but chiefly with a *reverential awe* of that transcendantly great Being, whose ways they desire to contemplate, and some part of whose councils it is their am-

bition to unfold. For, when we speak of God, farther than we are authorized by himself to speak, we are in constant danger of ascribing to him our own weaknesses, and of degrading his ineffable wisdom, when we think to exalt it most.

Such reason there is, even when we apologize for the truth of God, to do it *with meakness and fear*.

To conclude: Religious inquiries, when thus conducted (and only then) are commendable and useful. They exercise our best faculties on the noblest subjects: They may be the means of bringing some to the kingdom of God, and they can alienate none from it. Or, whatever the merit and the success of these enquiries may be, the authors of them will have the satisfaction of knowing, that they have inquired in a right manner; and, that, how little soever their UNDERSTANDINGS have *profited* the Almighty^d, they

^d Job xxii. 2.

have

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have honoured Him with the noblest sacrifice, which a mortal can offer to his Maker, that of an HUMBLE AND SUBMISSIVE SPIRIT.

SE R M O N

Preached Feb. 4, 1870.

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Never want books like this again.

A page philosopher, nay, and a Christian
researcher, might happily have forgot himself,
proportioned to the divine character of Jesus.
of this place, and the praise, infinitely dis-
human eloquence, the subject is unworthy
nically composed according to the rules of
called free speaking, or a discourse anti-
by speaking, he here meant what is

SERMON

NO. 111. [O58] 1770.

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S E R M O N IV.

Preached Feb. 4, 1770.

JOHN vii. 46.

Never man spake like this man.

IF by speaking, be here meant what is called *fine speaking*, or a discourse artificially compos'd according to the rules of human eloquence, the subject is unworthy of this place, and the praise, infinitely disproportioned to the divine character of Jesus. A pagan philosopher, nay, and a Christian preacher, might haply so far forget himself, as to affect the credit of *fine speaking*; or, his followers might think to honour him by
applauding

applauding this talent^a; But the Son of God spake with other views, and to nobler purposes; and his inspired historians would not have condescended to make the panegyric of their Master, from so trivial a distinction.

Let us see, then, to what the encomium of the text amounts; and what those CIRCUMSTANCES are, in the discourses of Jesus, which give real weight and dignity to the observation—*that never man spake like this man.*

This will be an inquiry of use, and not of curiosity only; we shall find, in the course of it, very much to confirm our faith, as well as to excite our admiration.

I. The first particular, that strikes an attentive mind in considering the discourses of

^a Hence the name of Theophrastus, or *the divine speaker*, given to the favourite scholar and successor of Aristotle; And hence the stories told of Plato, whose eloquence Quintilian so much admired, that he thought it more than human—*Ut mihi, non hominis ingenio, sed quodam Delphico videatur oraculo instinctus.* Quintil. l. x. c. 1.—Hence, too, the name of *Chrysostom*, given to the famous Greek Father.

Jesus,

Jesus, is the MATTER of them ; the most important, and, at the same time, the most extraordinary ; of the utmost consequence to mankind, and the most remote from all their natural apprehensions.

But, by the discourses of Jesus, so qualified, I mean chiefly those, which are truly his own, and properly *Christian* : such as acquaint us with the dignity of his person, and nature of his office ; with the purpose of his mission, and the manner in which that purpose was to be effected.

His moral discourses, though they be divine too, yet, being intended, for the most part, to deliver the religion of nature, or the religion of Moses, in all its purity, may be thought to contain nothing more than what human reason had, or might have discovered, or what the Law of God, at least, had already revealed. Yet it may deserve to be mentioned as an argument of his superiority to all other moral instructors, that He ONLY has delivered a doctrine of life and manners, free from all mixture of error,

error, and carried in some instances to a degree of perfection which, I do not say Reason, but, no Doctor of reason ever prescribed; and that he penetrated further into the true meaning of the Jewish Law, than any of its expositors had ever done.

But, as I said, I confine myself to his *peculiar doctrines*, such as constitute the substance of that religion, which we properly call Christian.

And here, the weight of his doctrine must be felt by those persons who reflect that, coming into a world overrun with vice and misery, he proclaimed pardon and peace in this life, and everlasting happiness and glory in the life to come, to all who with penitent hearts and true faith turned to him. What Doctor, Philosopher, or Legislator *ever spake as He spake*, on these important articles? What had Nature taught the Gentile world? Some fine lessons of morality, indeed, which might direct their lives for the future; but none that could set their minds at ease from past guilt, none that

that could free their consciences from instinctive terror, much less could erect their hopes to any assured prospect of immortality. What had Moses taught the Jews? A divine religion, it is true, but such as left them under the burthen of a painful and oppressive ritual, in which the neglect of any one precept, or the irregular performance of any, might shake their security; and of which, when punctually observed, the reward was only some present ease or convenience in this world. What was there in either institution, that could deliver men from all doubt and uncertainty about their future condition, or that could disarm and appease the universal guilt of mankind?

Let this then admonish us of what, from its familiarity, we are, now, so prone to forget, the importance, which characterized the doctrine of Jesus.

The *extraordinary nature* of it equally appears; but will further and chiefly be seen, if we attend to the means, by which this

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supreme blessing is said to be conveyed, and effected.

That a divine person, divine, in the highest sense of the word, should descend from heaven and take our nature upon him; the *the Heir of all things*^b should be content to appear *in the form of a servant*^c; and, having *life in himself*^d, should chuse to suffer death; that, by this astonishing humiliation, he should propose to effect an end, equally astonishing, The salvation of a ruined world; that, being without sin himself, he should offer himself a sacrifice for sin; that in virtue of his all-atoning death, he should undertake to abolish death, and open the gates of eternal life to the whole race of mortal man; that, in this way, he should assume to be our *Wisdom and Righteousness*, our *Sanctification and Redemption*^e; These are the great things of which Christ

^b Heb. i. 2.

^c Phil. ii. 7.

^d John v. 26.

^e 1 Cor. i. 30.

spake;

spake; these the amazing topics with which he filled his discourses. And must we not conclude, that *he spake as never man spake*? I do not, at present, urge the accomplishment of all these wonders. That is a distinct consideration. But it must be allowed, that he *spake* in this tone, and to this effect. And did ever any man before him utter such things? Did it ever enter into the heart of man to conceive such things? which surely are enough to arrest our attention; to turn our thoughts on the evidence, with which they are accompanied; and, till we admit the force of that evidence, to convince us, at least, that such a speaker as this, is eminently distinguished from all other speakers, that ever addressed themselves to mankind. He discovered, on other occasions, no defect of mind, or temper; nothing, that should lead us to suspect him of weakness, or enthusiasm; And when such a person so speaks, the sublime and extraordinary nature of his doctrine is no small presumption of its truth.

II. Another

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II. Another circumstance that distinguishes the discourses of Jesus, is the AUTHORITY, with which they were delivered. The people themselves remarked this circumstance, and were astonished at it; *for he taught them, says the sacred historian, as one who had authority, and not as the Scribes*^f.

Interpreters differ in explaining what this authority was; but it consisted, very clearly, in these three things. 1. He taught mankind without any degree of doubt and hesitation, with the air of one who knew the truth of what he said, and was perfectly assured of all he spake. *Verily, verily, I say to thee, we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen*^g. 2. He taught his great lessons of morality and religion, not as derived from the information of others, or from the dictates of his own reason, but as immediately conveyed to him from the source of light and truth, from God himself. *Whatsoever I speak, even as*

^f Mark i. 22.

^g John iii. 11.

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the Father said to me, so I speak^h. 3. Lastly, He delivered his doctrine, on very many occasions, as the proper author of it, as one who had a right to propose the terms of Salvation, in his own name. *I say unto You*—is the formulary, with which he prefaces his momentous instructions. *He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last dayⁱ.* *Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life^k.* Nay, he goes so far as to assert expressly, *that he hath life in himself, even as the Father hath life in himself^l.* And though he says, at the same time, that he had this privilege given him by the Father, and though he declares, elsewhere, that as *the Father had taught him, so he spake^m*; yet there is no contradiction in these affirmations; for he tells us expressly—*All things*

^h John xii. 50.ⁱ John vi. 40.^k Rev. iii. 10.^l John v. 26.^m John viii. 28.

that

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that the Father hath, are mineⁿ; And I and the Father are one^o.

These three circumstances, taken together, constitute the proper authority of Christ's doctrine. It was the authority of one, who spake from conviction; who spake by the special appointment of God the Father, who even spake, by virtue of his own essential right, from himself, and in his own name.

Compare, now, this *authoritative* way of speaking, with that of the Jewish Scribes; who explained their Law, as they could, by the precarious traditions of their forefathers, and the uncertain glosses of their celebrated Doctors: Compare it with that of the Gentile Philosophers; who quibbled, by the help of a little logick or metaphysics, on the nature of God and the Soul; who advanced their doctrines of futurity, on the credit of an old fable, or an old song; and even delivered their moral lectures on the

ⁿ John xvi. 15.

^o John x. 30.

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weak grounds of their fanciful or discordant systems; in the way of negligent speculation, or, which was worse, of altercation and dispute: Compare it, lastly, with that of all others, who, in antient or modern times, have taken upon themselves to instruct mankind; and see, if any of these ever assumed the exalted tone, or spake with the *authority* of Jesus, of *the Carpenter's Son*, as Julian and the followers of that school affect to call him.

But high pretensions, You will say, prove nothing. Not much, indeed, when destitute of their proper supports; yet so much, as to verify the observation of the text—*that never man spake like this man*. And if they prove thus much, they prove more; the necessity, or reasonableness, at least, of examining whether these pretensions be well founded. For claims of so extraordinary a nature, as they must needs awaken our curiosity, so they may demand our belief. When a voice speaks, as from heaven, it naturally turns our attention to that quarter;
and,

and, when it speaks in *inimitable thunder*^p, it speaks, methinks, like itself, and in accents that cannot well be misunderstood.

But our next observation will carry us further. For I make it

III. A third circumstance, in the character of Christ's *speaking*, that he expressed himself with more than mortal wisdom, on many occasions, when the malice and captious subtlety of his enemies put that wisdom to its utmost test.

He gave early proofs of this wisdom, when, at the age of twelve years, he reasoned with the Doctors in the temple, to such effect, *that all who heard him, were astonished at his understanding and answers*^q.

These answers, indeed, are not recorded; but many others are, in the course of his ministry; answers to nice, insidious, and concerted questions of the ablest men among the Jews, in critical circumstances, and on the most trying emergencies. And to these

^p *Non imitabile fulmen.* Virg.

^q Luke ii, 47.

questions he always replied with a presence of mind so unshaken, with a judgement so infallible, with a dexterity and prudence so conciliating, and at the same time with an integrity so pure and perfect, that no advantage could in any degree be taken against him. His adversaries came again and again to the charge; whom yet he repelled with so triumphant a superiority over all the efforts of their wit and malice, that he forced them in the end, *to marvel and hold their peace*^r. His divine responses came out so contrary to their hopes and their interests, that they were discouraged and deterred from provoking any more of them—*they durst not ask him any more questions*^r.

The limits of this discourse will not give room for a detailed account of these questions and answers. But they are thick sown in the Gospels: And ye will understand me to point more especially at those, that respected

^r Luke xx. 26.

^r Luke xx. 40.

his divine character, and kingly office^t; in which conversations the danger was, lest he should drop something that might be made a handle against him before the Jewish Consistory, or the Roman Tribunals; while yet he was not to betray his cause, or bely his pretensions. The danger was instant, and, if he had fallen under it, must have been fatal. For, in withdrawing his claim of being the Messiah, the *King of Israel*, he must have owned himself an impostor; in asserting it, at this time, clearly and openly, he would have given his enemies a pretence for treating him, as a criminal of state; an imputation which could not consist with the truth or dignity of his mission. He came into the world to suffer death, indeed; but not as convicted of any crime, not as colourably condemned by any legal sentence. His innocence was to be conspicuous, and his honour unimpaired^u.

^t See LOCKE's *works*, Vol. II. fol. p. 545—7. Lond. 1759.

^u LOCKE's *works*, Vol. II. fol. p. 543. Lond. 1759.

In this respect, then, it seems, as if it might be truly affirmed, that *never man spake as this man*. And, if thus much must be allowed, we are, methinks, but a little way from a further conclusion, *That, therefore, he spake by a divine spirit*.

If it be said, that this conclusion does not hold, *for that the same faculties of the human mind, which make us capable of SEEING this wisdom, may have PRODUCED it*, the ground of the observation is neither likely, nor true. Not likely in the present instance, where the wisdom in question appears to be exquisite and constant: qualities, which we are not accustomed to find united in the efforts of human wisdom. But neither, in general, is the position true: For then, the power of perception and invention would be the same; then, the divine intellect would be levelled with the human; then, the wisdom of God himself, so far as it was acknowledged and understood by us, would be our wisdom. Whereas, common sense tells us, that to discover

discover a truth and to apprehend it, to project a measure, and to conceive the fitness of it, are two things^{*}: And, though men differ widely in their capacities from each other, yet there is a capacity, which no man may claim, as there is a wisdom, to which no man pretends. The sublime views of God in the system of nature are comprehended, to a certain degree, and justly magnified and unfolded by many men, who, yet, have not the presumption to suppose that they were themselves capable, or that any man whatsoever was capable, of planning such a system. In like manner, we may see and adore the wisdom, with which Christ *spoke*, and yet conclude, upon

^{*} Every one may observe a good many truths, which he receives at first from others, and readily assents to, as consonant to Reason, which he would have found it hard, and perhaps beyond his strength, to have discovered himself. Native and original truth is not so easily wrought out of the mine, as we, who have it delivered, ready dug and fashioned into our hands, are apt to imagine. And how often, &c. LOCKE's *Works*, Vol. II. fol. p. 577. and 579. Lond. 1759.

good

good grounds, that, as no man ever did, so no man ever could, speak with such wisdom.

IV. A fourth circumstance (and the last I shall mention) which distinguished Jesus, as a Speaker, was the penetrating influence of his discourses, or the divine ENERGY, with which they were accompanied.

Other speakers have thought it enough to convince their hearers by cogent arguments; to excite their passions by lively images; to touch the general springs of humanity, or to practise on the peculiar foibles and prejudices of the party addressed. But Jesus had the singular art to convince without reasoning, and to persuade without rhetoric. Few and simple words, from that mouth, attained their end with ease: they struck the soul with more than all the effect of that eloquence, which hath been compared to lightning: they needed no help from tropes and figures, from the acquired knowledge of human nature, or from the information of others, but went directly
to

to the heart by their own proper and irresistible virtue. In a word, Jesus saw what no art could divine, he saw intuitively the naked conscience, the secret individual thoughts of those, with whom he had any concern ; and being able, withal, to possess their minds with a consciousness of this intuition, his least word, his look, nay his silence must needs *speak* beyond the eloquence of other men.

There are many instances of this sort, recorded in the Gospels. He saw the malice of the Scribes and Pharisees^y, while it was yet latent in the heart, and only forming itself into secret purposes and mental propositions ; and he surprized them by his answers, into shame and *madness*^z. He saw the seeds of ambition putting forth in the minds of his disciples : and by a word or two, he prevented the growth of them^a. By only *looking* upon Peter^b, he struck him

^y Luke v. 22. vi. 8. xi. 17.

^z Luke vi. 11.

^a Luke ix. 47.

^b Luke xxii. 61.

into

into remorse and tears. And by *answering nothing*, he *astonished*, at once, and convinced the Roman Governor, who sat in judgment upon him^c.

This inspection of the heart, was that which confounded the officers, whom the chief priests had sent to apprehend him, and drew from them, on their return, the advantageous report of the text—*that never man spake like this man*. For, by what he said in their hearing, he gave them to understand that he knew their commission, before they had opened it; and so disarmed their rage, by only signifying his acquaintance with their design.

The effect of what he said and did was, in many conjunctures, wholly disproportioned to his words and actions; and is only to be accounted for, from the clear insight he had into the mind, and from the secret influence which he knew, by an apt

^c Matthew xxvii. xiv. and xxiv.

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sentence^d, or by an expressive emblem^e, to inject into the conscience of his hearers. And what resistance can, indeed, be made to such a *speaker*, who hath the hearts of men in his hands, and *turneth them whithersoever he will* ^f?

In all views, then, whether we consider the *matter*, the *authority*, the *wisdom*, or the *effect* of Christ's discourses, we must needs be convinced that the text is amply verified, and that *never man spake like this man*.

To conclude: I have not amused you, in this discourse, with vain declamation. I am not solicitous to establish the credit of Jesus, as a consummate orator. My views are other and far higher. I would convince you, by a reference to plain facts, that he was more than man; that he spake by the unerring spirit of God; that

^d John xviii. 4—6.

^e Luke vii. 40. ix. 47.

^f Prov. xxi. 1.

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his word demands not your praise, but your adoration.

If men would take their ideas of this divine teacher immediately from his own doctrines, and not as they are misrepresented, or at best imperfectly represented by the glosses of others, they would come, of themselves, to this important conclusion : if they would make the Gospel their serious study, and not their casual amusement, they would want no monitor to let them into the merits, or the use of it. They would more than see, they would feel the spirit, with which Jesus spake ; and they would readily offer to him, not their barren applause, but their sincere obedience.

Till this salutary effect be wrought in those who call themselves the disciples of Jesus, it may not be improper to remind them of what he himself said to ONE, who was affected, as we may now be, by a sense of his divine power in speaking. He had been delivering great truths, with that authority and wisdom, which ever accompanied his instructions,

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structions, and the effect was answerable. For *it came to pass, as he spake these things, that a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said to him, in the customary style of approbation, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps that thou hast sucked. But HE said, Yea, rather blessed are they that* HEAR THE WORD OF GOD, AND KEEP IT^v.

• Luke xi. 27, 28.

SERMON

S E R M O N V.

Preached Nov. 20, 1774.

MATTH. xiii. 10.

The Disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest Thou to them in Parables?

TWO things are very observable in our Lord's conduct towards the Jews. He came to *instruct* them in the principles of a new religion, and to *convince* them of its divine authority. Yet to such of them, as were least enlightened by his doctrine, he generally addressed himself in Parables: And before such, as were backward to admit his pretensions, he was sparing of his Miracles. Now the contrary of this conduct, it

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it is said, might be expected: That he should have explained himself in the clearest manner to the uninformed Jews; and should have multiplied his miracles, for the conviction of the unbelieving.

I propose to consider both these circumstances in the history of Jesus; and to shew that his conduct, in either case, was suitable to his character and mission.

I, now, confine myself to the PARABLES; and shall take another occasion to consider the MIRACLES.

The Disciples, having observed that their Master spoke to the Jews in a more obscure and indirect manner, than he was wont to do in private to themselves, *came and said unto him, Why speakest thou to them in Parables?*

This method of conveying instruction in Parables, that is, in some feigned story, where one thing is put for another, and in which the circumstances of the story are to be applied to something different in the intention of the speaker, is well known to

have been of constant and familiar use in the old world, and especially in the eastern nations. This figurative cast of language had its rise from necessity, the rude conceptions of men requiring general truths to be presented to them, in sensible images. But it soon came to be affected as an ornamental way of speaking or writing, the liveliness of the image awakening curiosity, and affording amusement to the mind. Lastly, it was sometimes employed as a mysterious cover of important truths, to which a more than ordinary attention was to be raised, and especially of such important truths as could not be communicated openly and directly without offence. Under this last idea, the Parable, properly so called, presents itself to us. It was contrived on purpose to throw some degree of obscurity over the information, it contained: And it is in reference to this use and character of the Parable, that the Disciples ask why Jesus thought fit to address the Jews in this way.

To

To this question, why he spake to the Jews in Parables, and not to the Disciples, our Lord's reply is in these words—*Because, to you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to them it is not given.*

By this answer we learn, *First*, that the things delivered by him in this obscure way were not the fundamental truths of the Gospel, but *the mysteries of the kingdom of God*, that is, certain secrets relating to the progress of the Gospel, and the event of it in the world; a consideration, which will be enlarged upon in its place: And, *Secondly*, that it was not *given* to the Jews, at large, to be let into those mysteries, but to the disciples only.

But why *not given to the Jews?* why was it thought less fit for them, to be initiated in these mysteries, than for the Disciples? Our Lord condescends to answer, or rather to anticipate this question, likewise—*For whosoever hath, to him shall be given and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever*

hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.

The answer, we see, is formed on this general principle, “That information in the councils of God is not to be claimed as a debt; but accepted as a reward: that he, who hath acquired some knowledge and improved what he hath, deserves a further communication of it; but that he, who hath been at no pains to acquire any, or who puts his knowledge to as little use, as if he had acquired none, is so far from having a right to more, that he even deserves to have the pittance, he may already possess, taken from him.” And what more indisputable rule of reason, than this, That, in a matter of pure favour, we should deserve, by our good dispositions at least, this distinction, before we obtain it. So that the answer comes out thus—“I speak to the JEWS in parables, because they do not deserve, by the pains they have hitherto taken to learn of me, and by the dispositions they have shewn to improve what I have taught them,
to

to have further information plainly and openly conveyed to them: But to you, who have already profited by my doctrine, and are disposed still further to profit by it, to You I address myself in a plainer manner, because Ye deserve to be more fully and abundantly instructed by me." And to this answer, thus understood, what objection, or even what cavil, can be opposed?

But, further, when Jesus said to his Disciples, that *to them it was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the Jews, at large, it was not given*, this determination must be understood as founded, not merely on the fitness of the thing, as here explained, but on the positive will and declared purpose of God. This appears from what follows. For *therefore*, proceeds our Lord, *speaking I to them in Parables, because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaias, which saith, by hearing Ye shall hear and shall not understand, and seeing Ye shall see and shall not per-*

ceive. For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their hearts, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

Hence it appears, that the way of speaking in Parables, which Jesus employed towards the Jews, was that which the word of prophecy had declared he should employ towards them. So that this was one, among others, of the marks, by which the Messiah should be known and distinguished. *To speak in Parables*, was a part of his office: It was a duty imposed upon him, in his very commission.

But this, you will say, is only removing the difficulty one step backwards, and transferring it from the Gospel upon the Law; And You still ask, upon what reasons this strange way of proceeding with the Jews, thus foretold and enjoined, was founded?

Now,

Now, though it becomes us with much reverence to inquire into the reasons of God's dispensations, yet as we see, in fact, that it was God's will to treat the Jews in this manner, we may be allowed to indulge some conjectures on the subject; And, as we have traced this difficulty up to its source, this will be the proper place to attempt a more full solution of it.

To make way for this solution, let it be observed, that there are two ways in which this famous prophecy of Isaiah may be regarded by us; either, first, as *a mere prediction of the event*, namely, that by this way of speaking to them in Parables, the Jews *would* not be converted; Or, secondly, as *a judicial determination of it*, namely, that this obscure way of teaching was therefore employed, because it was in the divine councils that they *should* not be converted. In either way of considering the Prophecy, this mysterious conduct may, I think, be cleared up.

If we consider the *event* only, as pointed out by this Prophecy, then the reason, which Jesus himself gives of this conduct, and which has been before explained, namely the general fitness of such a procedure in itself, is a satisfactory account of it. For what more just than to leave men to the consequences of their own behaviour, and not to reward them with that, which they neither desire nor deserve?

But, perhaps, the event was not simply predicted of the Jews, but *determined* upon them^a. And there may be reason to take the prophecy, the rather, in this light, because however fit such a conduct, as it describes, may be in itself, yet, in fact, it was not observed towards the Gentiles, nor even the Jews after the descent of the holy Ghost; the Apostles not addressing either in the way of Parables, as our Lord had done the unbelieving Jews: and this agreeably to their Master's express injunctions to them—

^a See John ix. 39.

for there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, and hid that shall not be known; What I tell you in darkness that speak ye in the light, and what ye hear in the ear that preach ye upon the house-tops^b. This different conduct may then lead us to suspect that there was something peculiar in the situation of those Jews, to whom Jesus addressed his Parables, which this prophecy respected; and that it was God's purpose, in the case of such of them as should stand out against this so long abused mode of information, when proceeding from the mouth of the Messiah himself, to leave them under a judicial blindness. And supposing this to be the case, the conduct (as severe as it seems) may be justified by the following considerations.

1. All the notices, which it had pleased God to give to the antient Jews of the Gospel dispensation, were conveyed in this way of Parable. The terms, employed in the old prophecies, were all taken from the Law,

^b Matth. x. 26, 27.

but

but the true meaning lay deeper, and the right application of those prophecies was to the Christian Covenant, and to the character and dispensation of the Messiah. This method of predicting the Gospel under legal ideas, was employed for the wisest reasons^c; The Jews had been constantly trained and brought up in it; and, notwithstanding the real obscurity this mode of teaching was intended to have, yet with fair and attentive minds they might easily have apprehended the true drift and purpose of it. The Prophets call upon them perpetually to give this attention: they even drop frequent hints, that might lead them to the discovery; and, upon occasion, do every thing but expound in direct terms, their own parables.

What now was the effect of all this intelligence, so gradually, so repeatedly, so solicitously, as it were, imparted to them? Why, they would not hear, nor understand; they perversely and obstinately rested in the

^c See D. L. Vol. V. p. 339, &c. Lond. 1765.

cover of these predictions; would look for nothing beneath or beyond it; indulged their prejudices about the eternity of their law, and the temporal power of their expected Deliverer, so far, that, when at length their Deliverer came, for whom this chain of prophetic instruction was meant to prepare them, they did not and would not acknowledge him. For this gross neglect of a mode of information, so long and so mercifully indulged to them, God thought fit to punish them by the very instrument of their offence. He commissioned Jesus still to continue that way of Parables, which they had so outrageously abused; and so, in his justice, *made it the occasion of blinding their eyes and hardening their hearts*^d, to their final rejection and reprobation.

This seems to be the true state of the case: and what has Reason to object to it? Can any thing be more just, than that a much abused mercy should end in punish-

^d D. L. Vol. V. p. 341. n.

ment? And can any thing be more fit, than that such punishment should be the forfeiture of that blessing, which the mercy was intended to convey, and should even be inflicted by the very means of that mercy? What is there in this œconomy of God's religious dispensations, which contradicts our ideas of the divine attributes? Nay, what is there in it, which does not accord to the known methods of his ordinary and moral government of the world? Health and Prosperity, Parts and Learning, are the merciful gifts of God to some men. To these mercies, rightly improved, certain blessings are, in the order of his providence, annexed. Yet how often do we see men deprived of the blessings, for their misuse of those mercies, and deprived by means of the very mercies themselves! The mercies are a snare to them; and in the way of natural punishment inflict those evils, which they were

* See more on this subject in Dr. Warburton's Sermons, Vol. I. p 325.

intended to prevent. Thus, health and prosperity, ill employed, bring on a diseased old age, and an uncomfortable enjoyment of life; and parts and learning, so fitted to produce true knowledge, are the means by which many are led into presumption and mistake.

And in this way, we easily conceive how justly the Jews were punished, in their rejection of the Messiah, for their wilful abuse and misinterpretation of the Scripture Prophecies concerning him; and how fitly the punishment was conveyed by Christ's *speaking to them in Parables*, that is, by that mode of instruction, by that very instrument of mercy, which they had so much abused.

But though this perverseness of the Jews may be reasonably thought judicial, yet even *in his judgments God remembers mercy*. Let it therefore be considered

2. In the second place, that, though Christ's speaking to the Jews in Parables did eventually harden their hearts, yet not more
so,

so, perhaps, not so much as the open communication of truth would have done.

I before took notice, that the subject of Christ's parables was not the fundamental tenets of the Gospel, but *the mysteries of the kingdom of God*. This we know from the mouth of Christ himself; and it deserves to be considered. That Jesus was the Messiah, that all men were to believe in him, and to be saved by him, these great fundamental articles of his religion, together with his moral doctrine, were published plainly to all; and the evidences of his Messiahship, as resulting from his miracles and an appeal to their own prophecies, were in no sense concealed from the Jews. So that, in truth, the light afforded to them was by no means so penurious, or so darkly conveyed, as the objection supposes. What was kept back from them and thrown into shade, was only or chiefly, the future fortunes of the Gospel, called *the Mysteries of God's kingdom*; of which the rejection of the Jews, and the call of the Gentiles, were principal. These,
Christ

Christ delivered to the Jews in parables, *and without a parable spake he not* on these subjects, *unto them.* Now, though it be true that, had that people penetrated these mysteries, they might, by a right use of this knowledge, have been led to a just apprehension of many of their own prophecies, and, in the end, to an acknowledgment of the Christian faith; yet 'tis likely, considering their inveterate prejudices, that the clear delivery of these momentous truths would have had no such effect; nay, that their aversion to the faith of Jesus might have been increased by having this offensive information plainly and nakedly presented to them.

And there will seem to be the more weight in this conjecture, if we reflect that even to the Apostles themselves, till after his resurrection, our Lord proceeded with much caution in unfolding *the mysteries of his kingdom.* Then, indeed, *he opened their understandings*^f;

^f Luke xxiv. 45.

and,

and, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself^s. But before that event had taken place, so much light only was let in upon the minds of the Disciples, as they were able to bear^h: the parables were in some measure explained to them; yet a certain degree of obscurity was still left on the explanation itself.

From which conduct of their great Master, apparently assumed by him in consideration of their infirmities, it seems reasonable to conclude, That his greater reserve towards the rest of the Jews, in speaking to them in *unexplained* parables, was, among other reasons, therefore chosen by him, because it was best adapted to their prejudices, and even gave them the fairest chance for apprehending and embracing his doctrine. But

3. Thirdly, and lastly, what if we suppose (as we have the highest reason to do, after the trials, which had been already

^s Luke xxiv. 27.

^h John xvi. 12. Mark iv. 33, 34.

made of them) that no evidence whatsoever, not the clearest possible information, would, under any management, have had its due effect on the unbelieving Jews? In this view of things, the proposing of these mysteries under the impenetrable cover of Parables was the greatest of all mercies to them, since a further degree of light would not only have indisposed them to the reception of it, but must have aggravated their guilt beyond measure, and have left them totally without excuse. To *blind their eyes and harden their hearts* was then a *judgment*, if you will, but surely a judgment in *mercy*, if ever there was any such thing; a punishment inflicted upon them in the most tender and compassionate manner, which goodness itself could contrive, or which their deplorable circumstances could admit.

These things being considered, To the question, *Why did Jesus speak to the unbelieving Jews in parables*, we may now reply, *first*, That this conduct was reasonable in itself, on that general principle of EQUITY,

that he only, who hath, shall receive more abundantly: That, *secondly*, the JUSTICE of God was fitly exercised upon them for their refusing to be instructed by him in the way of Parable, and by the very medium of Parable, so abused: That still, *thirdly*, this parabolical method of instruction was, in all probability, better adapted to their circumstances, and more LIKELY to be effectual, than a plainer communication: And that, *lastly*, supposing it CERTAIN that no information whatever would have taken effect, this obscure and inefficient one of parables served, at least, as some excuse for their obstinacy, and was contrived, in mercy, to alleviate their guilt.

The result of the whole, is, That we are hence taught to adore the awful ways of God's providence, in this instance of *Christ's speaking in parables*; in which both his Justice and Goodness are so equally and signally displayed.

S E R M O N VI.

Preached Nov. 24, 1774.

MATTH. xiii. 58.

And he did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.

THERE were two things, I observed, very remarkable in the conduct of our blessed Saviour towards the Jews. One was, that he chose to instruct the more ignorant and uninformed of them, in the obscure way of *parable*: The other, that he wrought but *few miracles* for the conviction of such of them as were incredulous and unbelieving.

These two circumstances may be thought strange; because the less informed the

people were to whom he addressed himself, the more need there seems to have been of *the plainest instruction*; and the less disposed they were to believe in him, the greater necessity we may think there was for subduing their unbelief by *the force of miracles*. Yet the conduct of Jesus was not according to these expectations, in either instance; and has accordingly furnished the occasion of two corresponding objections to his divine character and mission.

To the *former* of these objections, that which respects his *way of speaking by parables*, I have already replied in a distinct discourse on that subject. The *latter*, which respects his *way of working miracles*, I now propose to consider.

The text, you see, points out the subject, and confines me to it. Jesus, in discharge of his general office, and from a principle, as we may suppose, of private affection, *went into his own country*, that is, to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, with the intention of preaching the Gospel there,

there, and of giving the people of that place the proper proofs of his authority and mission. Accordingly, the sacred historian tells us, *he taught them in their synagogue*; And we know, besides, that he wrought some miracles; for the people were astonished and said, *Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these MIGHTY WORKS?*

They were the more astonished, because Jesus was no stranger to them; and the rest of his family, people of an obscure condition, then lived among them. They knew him only under the idea of a *Carpenter's Son*, and they had observed perhaps nothing extraordinary in him; or, if they had, this very circumstance, as is not uncommon among neighbours and countrymen, might have infused some jealousy and dislike of him. Be that as it will, their prejudices against him were extreme, and they expressed them in the most contemptuous manner. *Is not this*, say they, *the Carpenter's Son? Is not his Mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joseph, and Simon, and*

Judas? And his Sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him. To these disparaging questions, which easily overpowered the evidence of conviction even from their own senses, Jesus only replied, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house. And then the text follows, which says, And he did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.

This is the FACT: And the question upon it, is, *Why Jesus forebore to work miracles among these people, because they did not believe in him?*

Before I reply distinctly to this question, permit me to premise *two* general observations; one, on the use of miracles, considered in themselves; and the other, on the use of miracles, as applied to the Christian dispensation.

First, then, I observe, that, a miracle being, for the time, an alteration or suspension of the laws of nature, our best ideas
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of the divine attributes lead us to conclude, that this violence on his own plan of government is only exerted for some very important end, and will be exerted no farther, nor oftener, than is necessary to that end. It is true, it may be difficult for us to judge, in many cases, of that importance, and of that necessity; but unless both be very apparent to us, in no case, can we be authorized to require or even expect, a continuance or repetition, much less a multiplication of these miraculous exertions. To judge otherwise on this subject, would be to charge God foolishly, and, in effect, to blaspheme his wisdom.

Secondly, I observe, that the use of miracles, as applied to the Christian dispensation, is to give credit to the character and pretensions of Jesus. It is supposed in this argument that miracles, duly circumstanced and fully attested, are sufficient to this purpose; but there is no reason to suppose that more or greater will be wrought, than that purpose requires.

These things being premised, to the question, *Why Jesus did not many miracles, before the unbelieving Jews of Nazareth*, I reply directly by saying

I. In the first place, *because such a display of his power was not necessary to their conviction*, I mean not to say at present, that more or greater miracles would not have convinced them (though it be very unlikely, that they would), but that they were not necessary to the end proposed by them, which was to afford such an attestation to the character of Jesus as might be a reasonable and, in itself, a sufficient ground of their conviction. More than this the Jews had no right to expect. And less than this was not offered: For when it is said, that Jesus did not *many* miracles at Nazareth, it is implied that he did *some*; and thus much they confess themselves in asking, *whence hath this man these mighty works?*

Now *some* miracles, nay *one single* miracle, seen and confessed as such, was a reasonable
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ground of conviction. More therefore could not be esteemed *necessary*, that is, were not required to furnish the fit and proper means of such conviction. Without doubt, God, if he had been so pleased, might have shattered and confounded all the elements, and have driven the men of Nazareth, and even the Jewish Sanhedrim itself, by the force and terror of his almighty power, into an unwilling acknowledgment of his Son, Jesus. But this is not the way in which he treats his reasonable creatures, even when he exceeds the ordinary methods of his providence. He does that which is simply fit and right, in respect of the end he has in view, and leaves the rest to ourselves. This, as far as we know, is the universal mode of God's government, and as far as we can judge, is the most worthy of him.

Still, it will be said, though Jesus was not obliged to do more for the conviction of these unbelievers, though more or greater miracles could not strictly be required of him, yet so limited a display of his power on such
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an occasion seemed penurious, and even unkind. A little more zeal, and some super-numerary wonders, might have better expressed his concern for his unhappy countrymen. I reply then,

II. In the second place, that as more or greater miracles were not necessary to the end of giving a just proof of his mission, so they were most probably not expedient to any other good end, but, on the contrary, would have been hurtful and pernicious to his unbelieving countrymen.

We have reason to conclude thus, if we consider that the same prejudices, which obstructed their conviction from *some* confessed miracles, would not have given way to *more*. We have an example in the other unbelieving Jews, especially in the rulers of that people, who, the more and greater miracles they saw performed by Jesus, were the more hardened in their unbelief, and the more exasperated against him. They even give it as a reason for
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their vindictive prosecution of him, that he *did*, and *was doing many miracles*^a.

Taking the matter then in this light, what other effect could a waste of miracles have had, but to heap guilt and vengeance upon their heads? By leaving these perverse people to themselves, perhaps their prejudices might subside, and they might yield in time to the evidence they already had, or they might submit to other evidence, which they should collect for themselves hereafter. To have irritated their prejudices, now, by further miracles, might have fixed them absolutely in unbelief.

This conclusion becomes the more probable, if we admit the pretensions of Jesus: For then he may be supposed to have certainly foreseen the present impracticability of converting these men, and to have restrained his power before them, on that account. But I am now arguing with those, who make this conduct an objection to his pre-

^a John xi. 47.

tensions. I offer it therefore as a conclusion only very probable from the nature of the thing, that his *not doing many miracles* before his unbelieving countrymen, was, among other motives, from *a principle of mercy and kindness to them*. At least, the contrary, I think, cannot be affirmed with any shew or colour of reason.

But whatever kindness our Lord might have for these men, his continuing to work more miracles among them, under the present circumstances, would have been improper, because

III. In the next place (and this is my *third* answer to the objection) *this conduct would have opposed, and tended directly to defeat, the general end and success of his ministry*.

The proper END of his ministry was to preach salvation to the Jews, and to give them such evidence of his being the Messiah, as was sufficient to their conviction. When he had done this in one place, if no very important considerations induced

induced his longer stay, he was to proceed to another. This was so essential a part of his office, that it seems not to have been forgotten, even when there was no peculiar complaint of *unbelief*, in those with whom he had resided. For when the people of another place, of more *faith*, as it should seem, *came to him, and would have stayed him, that he should not depart from them*, He refused to comply with them, and said, *I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, for THEREFORE AM I SENT*^b.

This then was the end of his ministry. He was to preach the word; but was not obliged to see that it took effect, or to wait the success of it. How repugnant then had it been to this end, to waste unnecessary time and power on unbelieving Nazareth, when so many other cities, and those better disposed, claimed their share of each!

But, further, the dispositions of these people towards him were such, as seemed

^b Luke iv. 43.

likely,

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likely, not only to retard and interrupt, but totally to *prevent* the execution of his ministry. They would either have found means, had he continued longer with them, to deliver him into the hands of the Jewish rulers, or by some act of violence would have taken away his life. This appears from the rage with which they drove him out of their city, and from their purpose, as St. Luke relates the story, to *cast him down headlong from the brow of the hill, whereon their city was built*^c. So that his attempt to convert them by more miracles, might have put an untimely end to his ministry, when it was now but little more than begun. And, though this event might at any time have been prevented by an exertion of his miraculous power, and without doubt would have been prevented in that manner, had the conjuncture made it necessary ; yet this was no reason for his exposing himself to that danger, since, as we before observed,

^c Luke iv. 29.

miracles

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miracles are not to be expected or employed, where the end in view may be accomplished by human means. Accordingly, our Saviour consulted his own safety on all occasions, during the course of his ministry, by every prudential method: And when he afterwards armed his disciples with the power of working miracles, he prescribed the same conduct to them, and, when they found themselves *persecuted in one city*, bade them *flee to another*^d. It is generally thought, indeed, that nothing but a miracle rescued him out of the hands of the enraged people of Nazareth. If so, his danger among them must have been extreme, and shews the necessity of his removing from them. However, if this last miracle was wrought, it was one more added to the number of those he had worked in that city, and, like all the rest, was lost upon it. On the whole, it appears certain then, that the *unbelief* of these Nazarenes was a just reason

^d Matth. x. 23.

for Christ's *not doing many miracles among them*, since the opposite conduct would have tended to *defeat the end and execution of his general office*.

Still, the most direct and convincing answer to the objection is behind: For

IV. Lastly, I observe that Jesus *did not many miracles* before the unbelieving men of Nazareth, *because* such a display of his power would have *been contrary to a general rule of conduct, which he prescribed to himself, and that, on the highest reason*.

This rule was, *not to work a miracle upon them, or for them, who were deficient in faith*: By which term, *faith*, I do not mean a grounded faith in him, as the Messiah, (for that could only be produced originally by miracles) but such an honesty and probity of mind as might dispose them to believe on the evidence of miracles. It was in this case, as in that of *Parables*, *to him only who hath, more was given*. And therefore the first question he put to those, who repaired to him for a miraculous relief of
their

their necessities, was, *Do Ye believe?* Are ye withheld by no fixed and willful prejudices from supposing that one, coming to you under the character of the Messiah, is empowered to do this for you, or from yielding to its evidence, when it is done? This was so indispensable a rule with him, that St. Mark, in relating this adventure at Nazareth, goes so far as to say that he **COULD NOT** do many mighty works there because of their unbelief^c. The meaning of which is, that there was, no *natural* indeed, but a *moral* impossibility of his working more miracles there; that is, he *could not do it*, consistently with the general principles, on which he acted.

And that these principles were founded in *the best reason*, no man can doubt who reflects, that the highest possible favour, which can be conferred on man, that is, a miracle wrought for his salvation, reasonably supposes some degree of desert, some prior

^c Mark vi. 5.

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dispositions to profit by it ; who reflects farther, that, where such a preparation of mind is not, the miracle is thrown away ; nay, worse than that, can only serve to the hurt and condemnation of that person, on whom, or for whom it is performed.

Men have a strange notion, that when God intends to convince any one by the evidence of miracles, he should repeat and enforce that evidence, till it take effect, whether we will or not ; nay, that the most obstinate and determined infidelity is only a stronger reason for his contending with it. But this is a very presumptuous, as well as injurious, conception of the divine nature ; It is presumptuous in the highest degree, because it supposes that we have a right to prescribe terms to infinite power and wisdom : It is greatly injurious to the Supreme Being, because it supposes that he has no regard to the moral worth of his creatures, or even to any reasonable end, in the wonders he does for them. The Scriptures represent this matter in another light : they require something,

thing, where much is given; they expect from us to *have*, before we receive; they suppose us in short to be moral agents, and not machines. And our Lord himself, speaking in the proverbial language of the Jews, gives it as a special command to his Disciples, *Not to cast that which is holy unto dogs, nor to cast their pearls before swine*^f. All this is agreeable to our best notions of the divine wisdom and goodness, as well as to the usual course of God's providence; and therefore on this footing only the conduct of Jesus towards the unbelieving Jews of Nazareth is abundantly justified.

To draw to a point, then, the substance of what has been said. To the question, *why Jesus did not more miracles, before the unbelieving?* We reply, That such conduct was not necessary to the end of miracles, which was to afford a reasonable conviction—that it was not likely to answer any good end, but, on the contrary, would have been

^f Matth. vii. 6.

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hurtful to such unbelievers—that it tended to defeat the design and success of Christ's ministry, by narrowing the sphere, or shortening the term of it—that, lastly and chiefly, it was unreasonable in itself, and contrary to the general scheme and order of God's moral government.

Let no man then abuse himself with foolish imaginations, as if Christ was wanting in that which became his office and mission; still less, as if he acted from any caprice, or unconcern for the souls of men, in not forcing their belief; but least of all, as if his pretensions had any thing to fear from the little faith of those to whom he addressed himself, and could only prevail with the weak and credulous, with those who were unable or indisposed to scrutinize his miracles. Even this last insinuation has been made, not only without grounds, but against the fullest evidence; the miracles of Jesus having been numerous, public, illustrious, and even acknowledged, at least not convicted of imposture, by his bitterest enemies,

enemies, by those who were most active and most able to examine into the truth and reality of them.

With regard to the miracles in question, let us be so ingenuous as to confess, that, if these were necessary to announce his office and character to the men of Nazareth, more than these were unnecessary, and that their unbelief affords the best grounds to conclude, that they were so. Consider too, that, if no reasons had occurred to us for this conduct, it could not certainly appear that it was unreasonable. When we know, in fact, what the method of God's dealing with mankind has been, in any instance, we may be able perhaps to discern good reasons for it. But we can seldom affirm with any shew of reason, from any preconceptions or general speculations of our own, what it should or must be. Here we are manifestly out of our depth, and cannot stir a step without the hazard of absurdity or impiety.

If we have reason to admit the divine authority of our Religion, whatever conduct it ascribes to Jesus, must be fit and right, however impenetrable to us. If we admit it not, our concern is to see that we have reason for not admitting it. This matter is to be tried by the evidence given of that authority only, I mean by the external proofs, and historic testimony, on which it rests. When this is done, no slight cavils of reason, no fanciful suspicions, no plausible objections, nor any thing else but the most obvious contradiction in something it asserts to the clearest dictates of the human understanding (which no man has ever yet found) can possibly shake, or so much as affect, that authority.

In the present case, we have seen how entirely groundless the objection is to Christ's conduct at Nazareth. But if this objection could not have been answered, nothing had followed but a conviction of our ignorance. It might still be true
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(as we now see it to be), that Jesus acted agreeably to his divine character *in not doing many miracles* before the people of Nazareth, *because of their unbelief.*

IV [O 120] H E 2
S E R M O N VII.

Preached May 23, 1773.

2 COR. iv. 5.

We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord.

WE may consider these words, either as an *admonition* to the ministers of the Gospel, *To preach not themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord*; or simply as a *fact*, which St. Paul asserts of himself and the other Apostles, *That they preached not themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord.*

In either sense, the words are instructive; but I take them in the latter sense, only. I would confirm and illustrate this assumed fact;

fact; and then employ it as a medium to prove the divine authority of the sacred writings. If it be true, *that the Apostles preached not themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord*, it will, perhaps, be seen to follow, *That therefore they preached not from their own private suggestions, but by the direction of the Spirit of God.*

The assertion of the Text is, indeed, general, and to this effect, "That a number of persons, who were employed to convert the world to the Religion of Jesus, did, in the tenour of their lives and the course of their ministry, pay no regard to their own interests of any kind, and were only intent on the due discharge of their commission."

But the subject, in that extent, is too large for a discourse of this nature. What I would offer to your consideration, is ONE SINGLE INSTANCE of that indifference which the Apostles shewed to their own interests, I mean, *Their total disregard of human applause in preaching the Gospel.*

In

In this restrained sense of the words, men may be said to *preach themselves*, in two respects: When they shew a solicitude to set themselves forth with advantage; 1. as to their MORAL character: And 2. as to their INTELLECTUAL.

I. When men would give an advantageous idea of their *moral character*, they usually express this design, either, 1. *By representing or insinuating their superior worth and virtue*: Or, 2. *By suppressing or palliating what may render it suspected*: Or, 3. lastly, *By dwelling on such topics, and in such a manner, as may give occasion to others to think well of their moral qualities*.

Let us try the Apostolic writings by each of these marks.

1. The first way that men take to illustrate their *moral character*, is, *By representing, or insinuating their worth and virtue, on all occasions*.

Consider those apologists for themselves, who have left us memoirs of their own lives. You will find, in most of these, an ambitious

bitious display of those moral virtues, by which they desire to be distinguished. They lose no opportunity of setting forth the purity of their designs, and the integrity of their practice. The rest, may do this with less pomp and affectation; they may preserve a modesty in the language, and a decent reserve in the air and cast, of their narration. Still, the same purpose is discoverable in all these writers, whether they openly proclaim, or nicely suggest and insinuate their own importance. When men are actuated with a strong desire of appearing in the fairest light to others; it unavoidably breaks out in some shape or other, and all the indirect ways of address cannot conceal it from the intelligent observer.

We have a great example in two, the most extraordinary persons of the pagan world, I mean, XENOPHON, and JULIUS CÆSAR. These admired men thought fit to record their own acts and achievements; and have done it with that air of neglect and unpretending simplicity, which has been the wonder

wonder of mankind. Yet, through all this apparent indifference, every one sees the real drift of these elaborate volumes: every one sees, that they are composed in such a way as to excite the highest opinion, not of their ability in the art of war only, but of the justice, generosity, benevolence, in short, the moral qualities of their respective authors. It evidently appears that they designed to be their own panegyrists; though none but such men could have executed that design, in so inoffensive and successful a manner.

But now, if we turn to the sacred writers, we shall find no traces of their *preaching themselves*, in this respect. These plain fishermen tell their story unambitiously, and without art; or, if we call it art, it is such an one as Greece and Rome had never been able to put in practice. No exaggerations of what may be thought praise-worthy in themselves: no oblique encomiums on their own best qualities or actions: no complacent airs in the recital of what may reflect honour

on their own characters: no studied reserve and refinement in the turn and language of their history.

If there be any virtue, which we may suppose them more than commonly anxious to arrogate to themselves, any moral quality, in which they would shine out to the observation of others, what more likely than an unshaken fidelity to their Master? that Master, whom they made it their glory, their sole glory, as the text speaks, *to preach?* Yet they are so far from respecting their own credit in this particular, that they relate their own infirmities and miscarriages; they acknowledge how wavering and precarious their *faith* was; nay, they tell us that, in his last distresses, *they all forsook him, and fled*^a.

2. This last circumstance reminds us of the next artifice which men employ to set off their moral character, *that of suppressing or palliating whatever may render it suspected.*

^a Matth. xxvi. 56.

As accomplished persons, as the great men, before mentioned, were, can we doubt that many exceptionable steps were taken by them in the affairs, they managed; that, on some occasions, their prudence failed them, and their virtue, on others; that their counsels and measures were conducted, at times, with too little honesty, or too much passion? Yet, you will in vain look for any thing of this sort in their large and particular histories. All is candid and fair, judicious and well advised: every thing speaks the virtuous man, and able commander. The obnoxious passages are either suppressed, or they are turned in such a way as to do honour to their Relaters.

Or, take another instance. When Cicero had offended against the capital law of his moral code, that, which enjoined the love of his country, first, by his backwardness to join the camp of Pompey, and, afterwards, by his prompt submission to the tyranny of Cæsar, What is the conduct of the illustrious Roman patriot, on this pressing occasion?

occasion? Does he frankly condemn these false steps, or does he content himself with a simple relation of them? Neither of these things: He softens and disguises the truth; he employs all his wit and eloquence to palliate this inglorious desertion of his principles, to himself and others.

I might add many other examples. But ye see, in these, a striking contrast to the ingenuity of the sacred writers. They study no arts of evasion or concealment. They proclaim their own faults, and even vices, to all the world. One, acknowledges himself to have been a furious bigot, a persecutor, and blasphemer^b: Another, relates his own cowardice, ingratitude, and treachery^c. There is nothing like a concert between them to cover each other's defects: They expose the vindictive zeal of one^d; the intolerant spirit of others^e; the selfish in-

^b St. Paul. 1 Cor. xv. 9.

^c St. Peter. Mark xiv. 71.

^d Luke xxii. 51.

^e Luke ix. 54.

trigues of all^t. In a word, they give up their moral character to the scorn and censure of their readers, and appear solicitous for nothing but the honour of their Master—*They preach not themselves, but the Lord Jesus Christ.*

But ye will say, this apparent candour was the most consummate art; and that they confessed some obnoxious passages in their lives, to procure to themselves credit in other instances. This, no doubt, is sometimes the case with artful writers and speakers: But then only, when small defects and miscarriages are confessed; or, when the facts are too notorious to be dissembled; or, if perhaps they confess such things of themselves, as are highly blameable, and might otherwise have been concealed, they do it to gain the praise of a more than ordinary frankness and ingenuity, they apparently make a matter of vanity, even of that confession^z. The case is much otherwise

^t Luke ix. 46.

^z See the *Essais of Montaigne*.

with the preachers of Jesus. They scruple not to tax themselves with the most odious vices; and these too, many times of such a nature as shews, they might well have been kept secret from all the world; while yet the discovery is made in such a way, that suspicion itself cannot charge them with the design of drawing any credit to themselves from it.

Hitherto, we have considered how men may contrive to celebrate or insinuate their own virtues, and to suppress or disguise their own vices, in narratives or memorials of their lives; and how free the Apostles are from the suspicion of doing either. But the same design may be prosecuted in writings of another sort: and we have writings of another sort from the hands of the Apostles. I observe then

3. That, when writers are studious of their own fame, they find means, in any moral or historic work, though themselves be not the professed subject of it, to do honour to their own character, *by dwelling*

on such topics, and in such a manner, as may give occasion to others to think well of their moral qualities.

They declaim, perhaps, with much heat against certain vices, or expatiate with much complacency on certain virtues; or, they labour some disgraceful portraits of bad men, and draw their favoured characters with all the heightenings of panegyrick: And who will suppose, after this specimen of their zeal, that they themselves are not adorned with those good qualities, which they so studiously recommend, or are not exempt from those bad ones, which they so industriously expose? The artifice is so common, that we have it played upon us every day; and yet so imposing, that it constantly succeeds with us. How many popular characters does every one call to mind, that have no foundation but in this favourable prejudice! But let me carry your thoughts back to antient times, and fix them on far higher instances. Who that reads the moral prefaces and digressions of the historian,

SALLUST,

SALLUST, but must imagine the author to have been a model of antient frugality and austere manners ? And who that looks into the philosopher SENECA, and finds him all on fire in celebrating some distinguished characters, and exposing some detested ones, but will conclude the writer to have been himself accomplished in all virtue ?

I make no enquiry, at present, into the real characters of these illustrious persons : I pass no judgement on the real merit of their books. Their zeal might be an honest one ; and the form of their writings might be owing to that zeal. But this, I observe, that the form itself is well suited to the purpose of those who would *preach themselves* ; and that the sacred writers have not thought fit to adopt this method.

Their books indeed are full of moral sentences and moral precepts (for they are teachers of morality by profession) ; but short, and simple ; and though earnestly enforced, not ostentatiously displayed. The historic part of their writings is wonderful

for its calmness, I had almost said, insensibility. No attempt to colour their good or bad characters. Even the transcendent virtues of their Master are left to be collected rather from the simplest exposition of what he said and did, than from any formal representation of them: And, what is stranger still, his betrayers and murderers are loaded with no invective, nor set to scorn in any odious lights^b. These divine men are superior to the prejudices even of virtue itself; and have so little thought of deriving a vanity from their own honest feelings, that we are almost left in doubt, whether they were, indeed, actuated by them.

II. Thus much for the indifference of the sacred writers to their moral character: Let us now see whether they are more concerned for their INTELLECTUAL.

There are two ways which men take to display their mental qualities: 1. *By labouring to make appear an extraordinary acute-*

^b Pensées de M. Pascal c. xvi. §. 3.

ness of understanding : And 2. By aiming at the praise of extraordinary wit and eloquence.

It is superfluous to observe to you how these two characters predominate in all the writings and speeches of uninspired men. Consider, if there be one exception in all those whom the world most approves and admires : Consider, if there be not evident symptoms of this vanity in every single writer or speaker, that has undertaken to instruct or reform mankind. I deny not, that many of these have been persons of great modesty and distinguished virtue : Yet they never lose sight of their own mental accomplishments ; they never forget, under some shape or other, in this respect, *to preach themselves.* Even He, who now so freely censures this infirmity in others, is, perhaps, at the instant, an example of it, himself.

Let us see, then, if *the preachers of the Gospel* have the singular prerogative to stand clear of this general imputation.

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1. They certainly lay no claim to any superior quickness of understanding. On the contrary, they relate many circumstances, which clearly imply their own dulness and inapprehension. They acquaint us with the gross mistakes, they were apt to fall into, in their conversations with their master; they are at a loss to comprehend his parables, nay to look beyond the literal sense of the plainest figures; they even record the reproaches which Jesus made to them on these occasions.

But this slowness of conception, it will be said, was in their early unenlightened state, and was, perhaps, affected by them to do honour to their subsequent illuminations. Be it so. But how do these illuminated men employ the divine light, that was imparted to them? In advancing curious theories in Morals, or in framing subtle Metaphysical systems? Do they affect a philosophic depth or accuracy in their researches into human nature, or a superior penetration in their reasonings about spiritual things?

things? Do they shine in paradoxes? or strike with quaint aphorisms? Do they entertain us with exquisite positions, or remote conclusions? Nothing of all this. What they teach of moral and divine things, is with the air of men, not who make discoveries, but who deliver known and familiar truths. They tell us many things, which we knew not before: But they tell them as matters of divine commission, not of their own collection or investigation. And, for the rest, they presume not to speculate upon them, at all.

Indeed, the general subject of their discourses was such, as gave no scope to the exercise, and afforded no gratification to the pride, of Reason. They publish to the world a matter of fact, of which they were eye-witnesses; they attest the death and resurrection of Jesus, and preach remission of sins in his name. These were the points *they witnessed both to small and great; saying none other things than those, which they had seen and heard, and which the Prophets and*

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*Moses did say should come to pass*ⁱ. Is there any thing in such a doctrine, as this, that looks like *preaching themselves*? Can it be thought that such teachers had an eye to the credit of their own abilities, or that they meant to advance the reputation of their own understandings above that of other men?

2. Still less reason is there to charge this ambition on their manner of preaching, or to imagine that they sought the fame of ingenuity from the terms in which they conveyed their instructions to mankind. If the substance of their doctrine was plain facts, their language was that of plain men. They spake not *with the enticing words of man's wisdom*; scarcely with the ordinary propriety, certainly, not with what is called the purity and elegance, of their tongue.

But the fact is not disputed, rather is objected to them by such as question their inspiration (with what reason, we shall

ⁱ Acts xxii. 15. and xxvi. 22.

presently

presently see); so that I may fairly conclude, that such men could have no purpose to recommend themselves by the arts of speaking, or, that, with regard to the praise of wit and eloquence, they could not possibly mean to *preach themselves*.

Nor let it be said, that this unornamented style of preaching was the effect of their ignorance, and inability to reach the graces of a juster manner. For, besides that it is no new thing for men to affect what they have no talents for, it is certain that ONE at least of the Apostles, He, whose province it was to convert the Gentile world, long since enamoured of the study of eloquence, and who, of all the Apostles, wrote most, it is certain, I say, that this great man was not disqualified by a want of parts or learning, from pretending to this prize of eloquence, if his ambition had condescended to it.

III. It appears then, with a reasonable degree of evidence, that the writers of the New Testament had no regard *to themselves*,
that

that is, to the reputation either of their Moral or Intellectual virtues, in composing those books. The fact, as singular as it is, seems well established; And I draw this interesting conclusion from it, *That, therefore, they preached, not from their own private suggestions, but by the direction of the holy spirit.*

This conclusion follows undeniably from that fact. For, if such a number of persons, of different tempers, educations, and professions, could be so disinterested as to overlook their own credit in a point, which all other men have so exceedingly at heart, and which no other men, nay which no other single man has ever been able to give up; and that too, when they were teaching a divine religion, and might therefore seem to have a decent pretence for assuming all sorts of merit to themselves; if this, I say, be a certain fact, what can we conclude, but that the spirit of God, to whose enlightening influences they ascribed their doctrine, over-ruled their natural self-love
in

in the manner of preaching it, and that *these holy men spoke, as they were moved by the holy ghost?*

To return then to the Text, and to conclude. *We preach not ourselves*—said St. Paul, in his own name and that of the other Apostles—*We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord.* The writings of these men are still extant; and bear the fullest testimony to the truth of what they assert. This, then, among many others, is an intrinsic character, impressed on those writings, of their divine original. It may be regarded, as a standing miracle, which, as oft as we revolve and consider them, speaks aloud, as in a voice from heaven, that the Scriptures, they have left us, are the *word and work of God.*

If their uninspired successors in the ministry of the word be unable to copy so bright an example of humility and self-denial, forgive them this defect, or impute it, if you will, to natural vanity and unsubdued self-love. But, when ye chance to observe
this

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this infirmity in others, forget not to say to yourselves, that this high privilege of *preaching not themselves* was reserved to the Evangelists and Apostles only, to dignify their character; and to excite, confirm, and support our faith; in a word, to manifest to all the world, in the very frame and texture of the sacred Oracles, that they were, indeed, dictated by the spirit of God,

SERMON

S E R M O N VIII.

Preached Dec. 15, 1771.

MATTH. xi. 5.

The Poor have the Gospel preached unto them.

MANY circumstances, attending the Gospel of Jesus, are such, as we should not previously have expected: Yet, when duly considered, they fully approve themselves to our best reason.

We have a memorable instance, in the Text. Among other marks, by which it pleased our blessed Lord to authenticate his mission, one was, *That the Poor had the Gospel preached unto them.* Go, (says he to the

the disciples of John the Baptist, who had sent them to know of Jesus, whether he were indeed the Messiah) *Go, and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and THE POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED UNTO THEM.*

We are surprized, perhaps, on the first mention of these words, to find this last circumstance put upon a level with the rest, even with that greatest of all miracles, *the raising of the dead to life*. We may not immediately apprehend, why the *Poor* should be thus considered by the Saviour of the world; or how the truth of his pretensions comes to be concerned in this treatment of them. But, upon inquiry, we shall find there were some important reasons which determined our Lord to this conduct, and which made that conduct, in a peculiar manner, expressive of his person and office.

FIRST,

FIRST, This character was directly applied to the Messiah, in the antient prophecies. Our Lord himself, in the text, quotes the very words of Isaiah: So that, *in preaching the Gospel to the Poor*, he fulfilled that prediction, and so far corresponded to the character, which the word of prophecy had given of the Messiah.

But this circumstance, we may suppose, would have been no part of the Messiah's character, but for reasons which made it fit and right, that He should be thus distinguished. Let us, further, inquire, then,

SECONDLY, what those reasons, probably, were; only premising one word, to ascertain the objects, both of the prophecy, and of our Lord's charitable attention.

There is no doubt but the word, *poor*, in the prophecies alledged, and in Christ's application of them, is very capable of being understood in a metaphorical or spiritual sense, and was even intended to be so understood; I mean, in that sense, which our Lord gives to the word, *Poor*, when he says—*Blessed*
are

are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven^a. But this metaphorical sense does not exclude, it rather supposes, the literal. For, who are *the poor in spirit*, for the most part, but *the poor in fortune*? they, whom neither the pride of knowledge and education, nor the pride of wealth and place, has corrupted with vain ideas of their own sufficiency? But, there is a peculiar reason for the literal interpretation of the Text. For the words, *blind, lame, and deaf*, have, likewise, their metaphorical sense in the prophet, as well as the word, *poor*. Yet our Lord alledges the completion of the prophecy, in the literal meaning of those words; for he refers the messengers of John to what *they saw and heard*; to the miracles, he was then working, or had worked, on *the blind, lame, and deaf*, that is, in restoring their bodily senses and members^b. So that, when the poor are spoken of by Jesus, at the same time, we must

^a Matth. v. 3.

^b Compare, *Luke* vii. 21, 22.

needs understand him as speaking of the *poor*, properly so called, that is, of the lower ranks of people, whom he was even then instructing, as well as healing.

We see, then, That Christ *preached the Gospel to the poor*, in the literal, as well as spiritual sense of that word: And, in so doing, he both fulfilled the whole extent of the prophecy; and, as we shall now find, gave an eminent proof of the GOODNESS and WISDOM of his own character.

For, consider the state of the *poor*, how much they wanted, and how much better, than the rich, they deserved, instruction, when our Lord, in mercy, came to *preach the Gospel to them*.

I. The condition of the *poor*, that is, of the people at large, was truly deplorable, at that time. They were every where treated by their superiors with the utmost contempt, and left to struggle with an almost invincible ignorance and corruption.

The Jews, indeed, had the benefit of a divine law: but their Scribes and Doctors

had made it of none effect; by their traditions^a. They had corrupted the word of God, by their fanciful cabbalistical glosses; and had debased their holy ritual, into a frivolous and sordid superstition. They had the key of knowledge in their hands; but they neither employed it to the purpose of opening the true meaning of the Scriptures, themselves, nor would suffer the people to make this use of it. In the mean time, their pride increased with their other vices: they thought themselves wise and prudent^d, and righteous^e; and, in sovereign admiration of their own worth and knowledge, they despised others. Their insolence to the poor was so transcendant, that they reproached them for that ignorance, which themselves had occasioned; and even checked their endeavours to understand the true meaning of their law, in terms of the bitterest scorn and execration. Have any of the Rulers or Pharisees,

^a Matth. xv. 6.

^d Matth. xi. 25.

^e Luke xviii. 9.

said.

said they, *believed in Jesus?* But this people^t,
that knoweth not the law, are accursed.

Such was the state of the *poor*, among the
 Jews: and that of the Gentile poor was no
 better. As the former were only insulted,
 and not instructed, by their RABBIS; So
 the *latter* were just as ill treated by their
 PHILOSOPHERS.

These men, indeed, *professed themselves*
wise; and had, in some respects, a juster
 claim, than the Jewish doctors, to that proud,
 distinctive appellation. Though their rea-
 soning, on many subjects (on which, how-
 ever, they valued themselves most) was
 little better than that of the Cabbalists; yet,
 in moral matters, which are of the highest
 concern to mankind, they had been able
 to trace out some plausible and ingenious
 theories, and had even penetrated so far as to
 apprehend some general and fundamental
 principles of natural religion. Yet all this
 was matter of vanity among them, rather

^t ὄχλος, *the mob.* John vii. 49.

than of public use. Their most interesting speculations were either confined to their schools, or secreted from the common eye, in their mysteries. Their moral systems were calculated to amuse, to polish, and, we will say, to instruct the higher ranks of men; but they were composed in such a way, and proceeded on such principles, that the vulgar could be little benefited by them. And, for what they knew of religious truth, they studiously kept it from the *poor*, and left them to the tyranny of their senseless, their impure, their abominable superstitions. Even Socrates himself, though he laboured very commendably to reform the lives of his fellow-citizens, yet laboured to little effect, as he would not, or durst not, disgrace their idolatries, the source of all their corruption and misery. The rest of these wise men were well contented, at most, with being *wise to themselves*; they stood aloof from the prophane vulgar; and contemplated, with much complacency,

complacency, or with much disdain, the popular errors.

Such, and so wretched were the *poor*, when our blessed Lord came to announce the good tidings of salvation to them! Incapable of themselves to find out or to understand their duty, and misled, neglected, or condemned by those who should have been their instructors; lost in error and in vice, with no prospect of recovering themselves out of either; without guides, and without friends; in a word, *without hope, and without God in the world*; What could equal their wants and their distresses? And how loudly did they cry to heaven for some friendly hand to be stretched out, some celestial light to be dispensed, to them?

But, perhaps, these unhappy men deserved not the care of heaven. And, without doubt, if we put their claim on that footing, it will be difficult to make out their title to such distinction. Yet they had some-

2 Eph. ii. 12.

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thing,

thing, too, to plead for themselves, something to engage the regards of their merciful Creator, if it be true, as I observed,

II. In the next place, that their hearts, depraved as they were, were yet not so utterly perverse, as those of the *rich and great and wise*, who poured such contempt upon them.

And, for our satisfaction in this point, we need but look into the Gospel-history; where we find, from many facts and testimonies, that the poorer sort among the Jews were they who gave the best proofs of their disposition to embrace the doctrine, and acknowledge the pretensions, of Jesus.

When he *preached* to the Jews, the Scribes and Pharisees, that is, the *rich and wise*, almost universally and without exception, cavilled at his doctrine, perverted his words, and sought occasion only *how they might entangle him in his talk*^b. But the people, giving way to the ingenuous sense

^b Matth. xxii. 15.

of their own minds, *heard him gladly*ⁱ: They were even *very attentive to hear him*^k. Nor let it be thought, that the love of novelty, or some worse motive, which oft seduces the populace in such cases, was the cause of this attention. They give another, and better reason of it—*Never man, say they, spake like this man*^l: Again, *they were astonished at his doctrine, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes*^m; That is, they had the sense to perceive there was a weight and force and importance in his doctrines, which they had never found in any other, and, least of all, in the light, frothy, and frivolous doctrines of their Scribes; and they had the honesty to acknowledge and proclaim their own feelings.

Again; When Jesus wrought his miracles before the Jews, while their superiors

ⁱ Matth. xii. 37.

^k Luke xix. 48.

^l John vii. 46.

^m Matth. vii. 28.

were unconvinced, or blasphemed against conviction, the multitudes cried out in admiration, *Is not this the Son of Davidⁿ ?—It was never, they say, so seen in Israel^o—* With a becoming candour and piety, *they marvelled, and glorified God, who had given such power unto men^p.*

Thus much for the Jews. And the same difference, between the *rich and poor*, afterwards appeared, when the Apostles turned themselves to the Gentiles. So that St. James reasons upon it, as a certain fact, *Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the Judgement-seats ? Do they not blaspheme that worthy name by which ye are called^q ?* And St. Paul to the same purpose, when he appeals to the Gentile Christians themselves—*Ye see your calling, my brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called^r,*

ⁿ Matth. xii. 23.

^o Matth. ix. 33.

^p Matth. ix. 8.

^q St. James ii. 6, 7.

^r i Cor. i. 26.

And,

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And, if we extend our inquiries beyond the Apostolic age, we still find, that, while councils and synagogues, priests and philosophers, governors and kings, were confederated against the rising church, the *poor*, the *weak*, the *ignorant*, the *ignoble*, very readily, and in great numbers, pressed into it.

Considering then this fairness of mind, which distinguished the *poor*, together with their multiplied necessities, we shall cease to think it strange that our blessed Lord should first and principally *preach the Gospel to them*; and that this circumstance should be predicted of him, and urged by himself, as characteristic of his person and office. For what could distinguish the divine Messiah more, than this condescension to those who most needed, and best deserved, his instruction? Who can wonder that, *when he saw the multitudes*, thus circumstanced, *he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted*^s, under the merciless vexations

^s ἐσκυλμένοι—*vexati*.

of their superiors, *and were scattered abroad*[†], and left exposed to every injury, *as sheep having no shepherd*[‡]? Could any splendor of miracles more illustrate his character, than that affectionate address to the poor people, groaning under all their burthens, of which the pride of wealth and wisdom was not the least, *Come unto me, ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls*[‡]?

Our Lord's whole ministry seems uniformly directed to this end of beating down the insolence of all worldly distinctions, which had too much vilified and degraded human nature. For this purpose, he condescended, himself, to be born in the lowest rank of life, to be brought up in what the world calls a mean and mechanic profession, to converse chiefly with the poor and in-

[†] ἐρριμμένοι—*projecti*.

[‡] Matth. ix. 36.

[‡] Matth. xi. 28, 29.

digent,

digent, to take for his companions and disciples the most sordid of the people, and to propagate his religion by the weakest and most unpromising instruments: *Choosing, as St. Paul divinely expresses it, the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; the weak things of the world, to confound the things that are mighty; And the base things of the world, and things which are despised, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.*

In a word, he seems studiously to have bent his whole endeavours, to vindicate the honour of depressed humanity; to support its weakness, to countenance its wants, to ennoble its misery, and to dignify its disgrace.

Nor let any one presume to insinuate, that this conduct of our blessed Saviour was directed to other ends; As if he sought, by this application to the people, to engage *them* in the support of his new kingdom,

1 Cor. i. 27—9.

and

and then, by their noise and numbers, to force the rest into it. The suspicion is utterly without grounds. Jesus made no factious use of the popularity he acquired by his condescension ; he discountenanced and repressed every effort of that nature ; and, though his care was chiefly employed about the *poor*, it was not confined to them : He *preached* indiscriminately to all, he did his miracles before all, in public, in open daylight, in the presence of the greatest persons, and in places of the greatest resort ; in short, his doctrines and his credentials were equally offered to the examination of men of all ranks and all denominations, of the doctors and rulers of the Jewish people, as well as of the people themselves. This, an impostor most assuredly would not have done.

We have now, then, a reasonable account given us, why it pleased God that the Saviour of the world should be known by this mark, among others, of *his preaching the Gospel to the poor*. The GOODNESS of his character was signally illustrated, by
this

this gracious conduct. I have only to observe, further, that his wisdom was equally displayed by it: And both together must needs furnish a presumptive argument of his divine mission.

Had the ablest speculative philosopher been consulted about the proper method of reforming the world, though with the attending evidence and authority of miracles, I suppose his plan for effecting this design would have been wholly different from that, which was taken. He would have counselled an application, not to the *poor* chiefly, if to them at all, but to the *rich*, the *great*, and the *wise*. The minister of this important charge would have been directed to shew himself in the most conspicuous scene, to make the capital of the world, imperial Rome, the head-quarters of his mission, to perform his miracles before the Roman senate, and to profelyte, first of all, the wise and learned of that empire; As conceiving this to be the readiest way to the establishment of his new Religion, and trusting to
the

the power of these great instruments, as to some irresistible vortex, to draw the people with them, into the general profession of it.

This, or something like this, we may imagine, would have been the language of human wisdom. But what would have been the event of these profound and politic counsels? Most probably, the design would not have taken effect. The interests, the prejudices, the pride, and the very philosophy of the world would have revolted against it. The plainest miracles would have been shuffled over, as the sleights of magick: and the divinest truths, been derided as unlearned and ignorant conceits.

But what if the event had been otherwise? What, if the new religion had prospered and acquired an establishment by these mighty means? Posterity would then have turned the argument in another manner. They would have accounted, and with some reason, for this revolution in the sentiments of mankind, not from the will of heaven, but

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but the power and policy of men. They would have sought the origin of this triumphant religion in the operation of human causes, and not in the controlling influence of divine. The new system might be preferred to many others that have prevailed in the world, but would be thought to have made its way by the same means. It would still be considered, as a mere human engine, calculated to serve the ends of society, and not to interest the conscience, as proceeding from the sole authority of God. And what could have been opposed to these suggestions? The cause is plainly adequate to the effect: And, thus, the glory of God would have been obscured; and the dispensation itself, exposed to contempt.

See then *the riches both of the goodness and wisdom of God*: Of his GOODNESS, in caring for the poor; and of his WISDOM, in providing by his use of so unlikely means, *that our faith should not stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God.*

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To conclude ; *the ways of God are*, very frequently, *not our ways*² : Yet, when the difference is most striking, a diligent inquiry will sometimes convince us (as in the case before us) that they may be justified even to our apprehensions : The use of which conviction should be, to satisfy us, in other cases, that his ways are always adorable, even when to us, in this state of weakness and blindness, they are *past finding out*.

² Isaiah lix. 8.

SERMON

S E R M O N IX.

Preached Jan. 24, 1773.

JOHN xiv. 2.

*In my Father's house are many mansions: IF
IT WERE NOT SO, I WOULD HAVE TOLD
YOU.*

THESE words are not a little remarkable; and, if carefully considered, will be found to make very much for the honour of the Christian religion, and its divine author.

Our blessed Lord was now upon the point of leaving the world. He foresaw, distinctly, his own approaching death, and the discouragements of all sorts, which, of course,

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would

would oppress his disciples, when he should be taken from them. He therefore applies himself, in this farewell address, to animate their courage by the assurance of future glory.

“ *Let not your heart be troubled*, says he, at the worst that may befall you : *Ye believe in the general providence of God : believe also in me*, in the care which I shall especially take to see an ample recompence made you for all your sufferings on my account. *For in my Father's house are many mansions* ; wherein each of you, according to his deserts, shall for ever enjoy an inviolable repose and felicity. And on this promise ye may rely with the most entire confidence : for know this, That, *if it were not so*, no consideration should have induced me to fill your minds with vain hopes ; on the other hand, *I would have told you the plain truth*, how unwelcome soever it might be to you.

We have here, then, from the mouth of Christ himself, an express disavowal of RELIGIOUS FRAUD OR IMPOSTURE ; and that, in a point where wise men have sometimes thought

thought themselves at liberty, nay under an obligation, to *lye* for the public service, and in a conjuncture, too, when, if ever, it might seem allowable for a good man to deceive his friends on a mere principle of compassion.

For what so beneficial, it may be said, to mankind, at large, as the persuasion of a future state, in which their happiness shall be proportioned to their virtue? And who, that has any bowels, would carry his attachment to strict truth so far, as not to suffer an unhappy friend to *die*, at least, in this persuasion, when the hopes of life, or the comforts of it, had entirely forsaken him?"

These questions are plausible: but our Lord, who was *the Truth*, as well as *the Life*, governed himself by other maxims. He knew that the real interests of mankind are only, or are best promoted by veracity; that every degree of fraud, though it may have some immediate, or temporary good effects, is, in the order of things, pro-

ductive of much mischief; is injurious to our moral and reasonable nature, which was made for truth, and finds its proper satisfaction in it; is liable to detection, to suspicion, at least; and if it be but the latter (entertained on probable grounds, and become, as it soon will be, universal), not only the chief benefits of the imposture are, thenceforth, lost, but truth itself, in other cases, is taken for imposture: of which there is not a more deplorable instance, than in the subject we are now considering: for, it being well known that men have been forward to deceive each other in matters of religion, and particularly in what concerns the hope or fear of a future state, hence, an incurable suspicion has sunk deep into the minds of too many, concerning Christianity itself; as if, in this momentous doctrine of life and immortality, it amused us only, as many other schemes of religion have done, with a plausible and politic fiction.

But

But our blessed Lord, as I said, had other views of this matter, and governed himself by other principles. He knew, who it was that had been *a liar*, and therefore *a man-slayer from the beginning*^a; and left it to him, the adversary of God and man, to signalize himself by *murderous* deceit and imposture. For himself, he tells his disciples, whom, of all men, it concerned him most to possess with this salutary belief of a future state; He tells them, I say, that, instead of deluding them with a groundless hope, he would certainly, and even at this season, which made that hope so infinitely precious, declare to them the simple truth, and on no account permit them to continue under a false (if it had been false), though flattering persuasion.

Shall we believe this great teacher, on his own word? Or, will you suspect, that even this uncommon declaration, uncommon in the founder of a new religion, was

^a ψεύστης—ἀνθρωποκτόνος—John viii. 44.

only a refinement of art and policy; and that Jesus hoped, by this shew of frankness, to propagate his favourite imposture the more successfully in the world?

I know, and have just now observed, to what lengths our ingenious suspicions on this subject are apt to run. But consider the circumstances; and then judge for yourselves, whether the suspicion, in this case, be well founded.

In my Father's house, says he, are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. And can we doubt his sincerity in this declaration, when he was now to make an experiment of its truth; and the deception, if it were one, was first to operate on himself, before it affected others? A speculative reasoner, or a politic legislator, when planning his system at his ease, and in no danger of being called upon to make trial of his own principles, might discourse with much complacency, though with little inward belief, of a happy futurity. But for one, who was just stepping into that world, of
which

which he announced such wonders, who was going, by one confident venture, to put his doctrine to the proof, and to expire in torments from a view to his own promises ; for one, I say, thus circumstanced, knowingly to delude himself and others, is not in human nature, unless perverted by such a degree of weakness or vanity, as no man will think chargeable on the character of Jesus. Socrates, the ablest and the honestest of the antient sages, had, on moral principles, reasoned himself into a favourable opinion of the soul's immortality. He had often expressed this opinion to his friends, in terms of some force ; and there were times in which he seemed very little, if at all, to question the truth of it. Yet, when he came to die, and had taken the fatal cup into his hand, his resolution gives way, he hesitates, and leaves his followers, after first of all confessing himself to be left in the utmost uncertainty on this momentous topic : a conduct surely very natural, and becoming a wise man, who had not, and

who knew he had not, the most convincing evidence of its reality !

But there are further reasons to think that Jesus was sincere in making this declaration to his disciples, suggested to us by *the terms of his religion*, and by *his own personal character*.

Those *terms* were, that whoever believed in the name of Christ, that is, became a convert to his religion, was thenceforth to encounter all sorts of difficulties, and dangers, and distresses, nay, death itself, and that, in every dreadful shape, which the malice of the world could invent, rather than to retract or forego his open profession of it. This, the disciples had been often told by their Master ; who, whether as a prophet, or a wise man (it matters not which, to our present purpose) had distinctly foreseen, and had set before them in all its force, what they were to expect and to suffer for his sake, and the sake of the Gospel. Other teachers of religion and philosophy required no such terms of their

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followers,

followers, or had reason to apprehend no such consequences from the propagation of their opinions. They might therefore keep their doubts to themselves, if they had any, of a future state: In Jesus, such reserve, or dissimulation, would have been the most unfeeling cruelty,

And against whom is this suspicion indulged? Why against HIM (and that was the other consideration I mentioned) whose personal character was that of goodness and philanthropy itself. This character shines out in every page of the Gospel. We see it in all he said and did to his disciples, whom he calls his *friends*, and treats as such on all occasions: witness his condescension to their infirmities, his concern for their safety (while it might consist with their duty), his compassion for their sufferings, his friendliness of temper, we may even say, his affection for their persons and virtues. In short, the sympathetic tenderness of his nature was evidenced in all ways, in which it could

could possibly shew itself, even by that of tears.

Now, put these two things together, his *deep concern for the interests of his disciples*, on the one hand, and *the severe injunctions he gave them*, on the other, and see if there be any possibility of mistrusting our Lord's good faith in that memorable declaration—*In my Father's house there are many mansions:* IF IT WERE NOT SO, I WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU.

His language on the subject, so interesting to them, had, indeed, been always the same. *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven*^b. This he said in the beginning of his ministry: This he now repeats in the close of it; but with that remarkable assurance (now for the first time given, and, from the *time* of giving it,

^b Matth. v. 11, 12.

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not more important, than it is credible) *if it were not so*, if your *reward in heaven* were not such, and so great, as I have ever affirmed it to be, in recompence of all your sufferings, past and to come, for my sake, I would not have left you under an error in what so infinitely concerns You—*I would expressly have told you of it.*

THE USE we have to make of these reflections is, to see what our *Lord's character* truly was; and what our reasonable *hopes and expectations* from him are.

I. But for this declaration, it might be thought, that Jesus, pushed on by an eager ambition of being the founder of a sect, had, for his *own* ends, preached up this alluring doctrine of a future state; or, that, heated by a moral enthusiasm, he had overlooked the mischiefs of his scheme, in contemplation of the *public* ends, it might serve, as applied to the important interests of virtue and religion. Surmises of this sort might have sprung up in the minds of men, not prejudiced against the author of our faith; and

and would certainly have been cherished and malignantly insisted upon by his enemies. But it now appears, that he disclaimed all such views and purposes : that he was cool enough to see the iniquity of all religious deception ; and just enough to acknowledge the cruelty of it, in the present instance. If he had not certainly known the truth of his doctrine, he would have recalled and disowned it. He felt, in his own case, what it was to encounter death for conscience-sake ; and he knew what deaths others were to encounter on the like grounds of persuasion. But *for the joy that was set before him*, how could the shame and agony of that cross be endured ? And, if there be no recompence of reward, should he expose to such, or to equal sufferings, his honest, unsuspecting, affectionate followers ? The instant moment^c, the imposed duty^d, the

^c John xiii. 1.

^d Matth. x. 32, 3. and 38, 9. Luke xiv. 26. 1 John iii. 16.

foreseen

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foreseen event^e, the upright mind^f, the feeling heart^g, all conspire to satisfy us, that Jesus was not, could not be the fraudulent, that is, the insensible, the unrelenting, the merciless inventor or publisher of a politic fable, but a teacher of truth and righteousness sent from God.

Thus much for our Lord's *general character*; which we shall do well to keep in mind, when we meditate on any part of his instructions to us; but more especially, when, for our singular comfort, we attend to his great doctrine of a BLESSED IMMORTALITY. Our divine Master has, in the clearest and fullest terms, announced this doctrine to us; and, what is more, he has anxiously removed the only possible doubt, which we could have of its truth, by disclaiming the politic use, which too many others had presumed to make of it.

^e John xvi. 2. 33.

^f Matth. vii. 12.

^g Luke xix. 41. John xi. 35.

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It follows, that we may rely, with confidence, on this invaluable promise of a future life; the only source of peace and comfort to the mind, without which the disordered scene of this life is inexplicable to the wisest men, and scarce supportable by the happiest; we may, I say, rely with safety on this *glorious hope*^h of immortality, unless we will suppose that Jesus meant to deceive us even then, when he most deliberately and solemnly pledged himself to us for his veracity: a supposition, which is, in truth, as foolish as it is indecent.

Affured therefore, as we are, that our Saviour both taught this doctrine, and taught it without the least mixture of guile or dissimulation, let us hold fast our expectation of it to the end; and in all the troubles of this life, whether endured for conscience-sake or not, provided only they be such as consist *with* a good conscience, let us reckon with certainty on our title to one of those eternal

^h ἡ ἐλπίς τῆς δόξης.—Col. i. 27.

mansions,

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mansions, of which there are so *many in the house of our heavenly Father*; and that, for the sake and through the merits of our LORD JESUS CHRIST; the author of our salvation, as well as the proclaimer of it; our merciful Redeemer, at once, and infallible Instructor; to whom be all honour, praise, and thanksgiving, now and for ever.

Amen.

SERMON

S E R M O N X.

Preached May 5, 1776.

JOHN xvi. 12, 13.

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, shall come, he will guide you into ALL TRUTH: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and HE WILL SHEW YOU THINGS TO COME.

THERE is scarce a page in the Gospels, which to an attentive reader may not afford a striking proof of their divine original. We have an instance in the words before us: in which, Jesus, now about to leave the

the world, tells the disciples, that he had *many things to say unto them*, which were not proper for their ear at this time, but that these, and all other necessary truths should hereafter be imparted to them by a *divine spirit*, to be sent from heaven to be their guide and instructor : that, from *him*, they should learn what, for the present, he forbore to communicate to them, of his views and purposes in the religion, they were to teach mankind ; nay, and that this divine *Spirit of truth* would *shew them things to come*.

Now Jesus, I suppose, whatever else may be thought of him, will be readily acknowledged to have been, at least, a discreet and wise man : for without a very high degree of discretion and wisdom, it was plainly impossible for him to do the great things, he did ; I mean, to be so successful, as he was, in imposing a new faith and religion on mankind. They, who take Christianity for an imposture, must confess, at least, that it was an imposture, artfully contrived, and

ably conducted: otherwise, the effects of it could never have been, what we see they are.

But would any man, acting on the principles of human wisdom, only, have given an assurance of this kind (an assurance, too, that seemed not *necessary*) to those whom he thought fit to entrust with the care of his imposture, when yet he must certainly know that he could not make good to them what he had promised; and when they, to whom such assurance was given, might easily, and, as he must foresee from his knowledge of human nature, would certainly abuse it, to selfish ends of their own, not consistent with his, and to the hurt of that very cause, which he wanted to promote?

Say, that he had, only, told them—*this divine spirit shall instruct you in many things concerning my religion, which I have not, myself, thought fit to reveal to you*—would not this general promise have opened a door to all sorts of fraud, or extravagance? And
could

could he reasonably expect that any well-concerted scheme of religion, such as was likely to make its fortune in the world, would be delivered and established by men, who were commissioned to enlarge his system, at pleasure, and, as their various passions, or fancies, might suggest? And all this, on the same authority with that which he had claimed to himself?

Suppose, they were *honest*, or, *faithful to him*, that is, disposed to teach nothing but what should agree to their master's doctrine, yet who could answer for their skill or judgment? And, if they were *dishonest*, or *unfaithful*, what ruin must not this licence of building on his doctrine, have brought on the structure, he had already raised?

When Mark Antony was allowed to *forge* a will for Cæsar, we know the use he made of that liberty. But had he been a better man, than he was, and inclined to give out that only for Cæsar's will, which might probably seem to be so, yet his capacity to make a will for Cæsar, in all respects uni-

form, and consistent with that great man's known views and character, might well be called in question, notwithstanding the whole contrivance depended on himself; much more, if the arduous task had been entrusted to *eleven* persons, besides, of different abilities, and dispositions.

Still, the case is more desperate, than we have hitherto supposed. Besides a liberty of adding what new consistent doctrines, they pleased, to the doctrine of Jesus, the disciples have a greater and more dangerous power committed to them, a power of *prophesying*, or foretelling *things to come*.

To see how the case stands on this last supposition, consider, 1. *What is implied in this PROPHEPIC power.* 2. *What abuses are likely to be made of such an assumed power by ANY men whatsoever.* And, 3. *What peculiar abuses of it were to be expected from SUCH men, as the disciples.* Consider, I say, these three particulars, and then, upon the whole, determine for yourselves, whether

any man of ordinary prudence would have commissioned his followers to exercise such a power; or, if he had done so, and had been an impostor, whether the event could possibly have been what it clearly was.

1. The *prophetic power*, implies an ability of looking into the future history of mankind; of foreseeing what revolutions shall happen in states and kingdoms; what shall be the issue of depending wars, or counsels: what the prosperous, or adverse fortune shall be of public, or private persons; of those, who have any authority over us, or connection with us; of individuals, or collective bodies of men; of friends, or enemies. Whoever has this extraordinary power committed to him, or who thinks he has, has the characters of all men at his mercy; can blast the reputation of the wisest and best men, by a charge of follies and crimes, *not yet committed*; or can raise the credit of the worst and weakest, by covering their *future* life with wisdom and honour. He can intimidate the greatest

men by announcing their disgrace and ruin; or exalt the meanest by bringing out to view their successes and triumphs. In a word, he can speak peace or war, fame or infamy, life or death, to any state or person, against whom he thinks fit to level this powerful engine of inspiration.

And as all men, so all *times*, are equally within his reach. He can pursue the objects of his love or hate through ages to come; and can excite hopes and fears in the breasts of those, who are not to appear on the stage of the world, till many centuries after he has left it, and when himself has nothing to apprehend, let his predictions take what turn they will, from the shame of detection.

Such then being the nature of this mighty privilege to foretell *things to come*, you cannot but see

2. In the next place, *how liable this power is to be abused by ANY men whatsoever, who have a pretence to assume it.*

Make,

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Make, if you will, the most favourable supposition, that these pretended prophets are *able and learned*: But then, what endless schemes of fraud, of policy, of imposture, may ye not expect from the dextrous management of this faculty! Revolve with yourselves the history of antient divination, or modern prophecy, when lodged in the hands of artful and designing men; and see, what portentous abuses must needs arise from this commission, and yet what certain disgrace and confusion to the memory of those, to whom it is given.

What blessings will not men, entrusted with this convenient foresight of futurity, lavish on their own friends, or party! And what curses, what terrors, equally belied in the event, will they not scatter over the persons or affairs of rivals and enemies, for the gratification of a present passion or interest!

Suppose them cool enough to distrust the reality of their inspiration, yet the temptation, to make the pretence of it subservient

to their own views, would be almost irresistible; Or suppose them, on the other hand, to prophesy with good faith, this genuine enthusiasm might enable them to act their part more naturally indeed, but, in the end, not more successfully.

Had then the Apostles been, each of them, as provident and wise, as their Master himself, and as much persuaded of their own inspiration, as he could desire them to be, they would not, we may be sure, have been encouraged by him, if an impostor only, to think themselves possessed of a prophetic power, when it must have turned to the ruin of his cause, on every supposition; I mean, equally on the supposition of its being regarded as a real, or pretended, power; that is, whether the Apostles were guided by the views of a dishonest policy themselves, or were the honest dupes of their master's policy. But there is

3. Still more to be said on the improbability of a wise man's giving such an assurance to men *qualified and circumstanced*, as the

the Apostles were, in other words, *to men of their PECULIAR character and situation.*

I. The *character* of the Apostles, was that of plain, uneducated, illiterate men; men, totally unacquainted with the world, and with those arts, which are necessary to conduct a great design with ability and success; men, of good sense, indeed, and of honest minds, but, from their singular simplicity, only qualified to report what they had seen or heard, and by no means provident or skillful enough to round and complete a scheme, but half-disclosed by its author, and that half delivered incidentally and by parcels to them, and ill understood.

Yet to these men, Jesus declares, that much was wanting to the integrity of that religious system, which they were appointed to teach: and that all defects in it were to be supplied, not by himself, but by a *divine spirit*, who should hereafter descend upon them, and LEAD THEM INTO ALL THE TRUTH^a; nay, who should not only

^a εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν ἀληθείαν.

instruct them in such parts of his religion, as he had imperfectly, or not at all, explained, but should, further, open to their view I know not what scenes of futurity, and
SHEW THEM THINGS TO COME.

These magnificent promises, you see, were likely to make a deep impression on the rude minds of the disciples; half-astonished, we may suppose, at the idea of such superior privileges, and more than half-intoxicated with the conceit of that pre-eminence, which those privileges were to bestow,

Their implicit faith, too, in a beloved and revered Master, would incline them to expect, with assurance, the completion of these promises: And thus, every principle, whether of simplicity, vanity, or credulity, would make their presumption violent, and leave it without controul.

2. If we turn, next, to the *situation* of these men, buoyed up with such exalted hopes and expectations, we shall find it apt to create a fanaticism, which, of itself, might

might drive them, in the absence of their politic Master, into any excess. These simple, over-weening men were, at the same time, poor, friendless, despised, insulted, persecuted; exposed to every injury from the number, power, and malice of their enemies, as Jesus, indeed, had honestly forewarned them; yet stung with the desire of founding a temporal kingdom (contrary, it must be owned, to his express declaration) and of rising themselves to the first honours of it. Could any thing flatter their ambition more, than to be told that they had the modelling of their own scheme left to themselves, under the cover of a supernatural direction? Or, could any thing gratify their resentments, all on fire from ill usage, more effectually, than to be assured that the fates of their adversaries, all the secrets of futurity, lay open to their view? How oft has oppression turned faith into fanaticism, and made prophets of those, whom it only found zealots! And do we think that secular ambition, concurring with religious

ligious zeal, in the like circumstances, could have any other issue; especially, when the prophetic impulse was looked for by such zealots, and, on the highest authority, actually engaged to them? Or, can we, who see the probability, the certainty, of this consequence, conceive so meanly of Jesus, considered in the view of a wise man only, as to imagine that He should not be aware of it?

As then it is very unlikely that any politic impostor should make such a promise, as the text contains, a promise liable to be abused by *any* sort of men, and most of all by *those*, to whom it was made; so neither is it conceivable that, if a rash enthusiast had authorized his followers to rely on such a promise, the issue of it could have been that, which we certainly know it to have been.

For consider, what were the additions, made to the scheme of Jesus by his enlightened followers, and what the prophecies delivered by them? Only, such additions,

additions, as served to open and display the scheme of the Gospel, in a manner that perfectly corresponded with the declared views of its author, or at least no way contradicted them : And only, such prophecies, as have either been clearly fulfilled, or not convicted of imposture, to this day.

Then, again, those additions, were directly contrary to the preconceived notions and expectations, of those who made them ; such, for instance, as the doctrines concerning *the rejection of the Jews, the call of the Gentiles, the abolition of the Mosaic ritual, and the spirituality of Christ's kingdom* ; doctrines, which, in the life-time of their Master, and till enlightened by the promised spirit of truth, they had either not understood, or had rejected as false and incredible ; yet doctrines, which made the principal part of those *truths*, into which they were *led by the spirit*.

And as to the prophecies, delivered by them, what less could one expect from so general, and so flattering a promise, than
that

that they should be *numerous*, and, at the same time, *replete with presages of good fortune* to themselves and their party, and with *terrible denunciations of wrath* against their opposers? Yet nothing of all this followed. The predictions, they gave out, were indeed so many as to shew that the promise was performed to them; yet, on the whole, but *few*; in truth, much fewer than can be imagined without a particular inquiry into the number of them: And of these few, the greater part were employed in declaring the corruptions, that should hereafter be made of the new religion, they were teaching, and the disasters that should befall the teachers of it; and scarce *one*, directed against their present and personal enemies.

All this is astonishing, and unaccountable on the common principles of human nature, if left to itself in the management of such a faculty as that of prophetic inspiration. And, though, on these principles, it was to be supposed, nay, might certainly have been concluded, that a set of the craftiest impostors,

postors, or of the honestest fanatics, that ever lived, must, in the end, dishonour themselves by the exercise of such a power, and defeat their own purpose; yet, to the surprize of all reflecting men, they have maintained, to this day, their character of veracity, not one of their prophecies having fallen to the ground; and, what is more, with so many chances against the success of their cause, they have triumphed over all opposition, and have established in the world a new religion with that force of evidence, which, as their Master divinely foretold, *all their adversaries have not been able to gainsay.*

In a word, the EVENT has been, and is such, as might be expected, if the divine assistance promised, was actually imparted to them; but improbable in the highest degree, or rather impossible to have taken place, if fraud, or enthusiasm, had been concerned, either in giving, or fulfilling, this promise.

It would be equally an abuse of your patience, and an affront to your good sense, to enlarge farther on so plain a point. From
recollecting,

recollecting, and laying together, the circumstances, which have been now briefly touched, and pointed out to you, ye will conclude, That, when Jesus gave this extraordinary *promise* of the Spirit to his followers, he certainly knew, that he should be able to make good his engagements to them: And that this *spirit*, being of God, would not be at the command of his followers, to be employed by them, as their passions, or short-sighted policies, might direct; but would operate in them, according to the good pleasure and unerring wisdom of HIM, who sent this celestial guide; or, in the words of the text, *that he should not speak of himself, but whatsoever he should hear, that, only, he should speak.*

No ill effects would, then, proceed from the privilege of being let into *new truths*, or, of being entrusted with the power of foretelling *things to come*. And, from the very consideration, that Jesus had *engaged* to confer such privileges upon his disciples, who, if not overruled in the use of them, that is,

if

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if not truly and immediately inspired, would, or rather must, have employed them to the discredit and subversion of his own design ; from this single consideration, I say, it may fairly be concluded, especially when we can now compare the assurance with the event, That He himself was the person, he assumed to be, that is, A DIVINE PERSON ; and his religion, what we believe it to be, THE WORD AND WILL OF GOD.

S E R M O N XI.

Preached May 29, 1774. T. S.

ACTS i. 11.

Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

AS the entrance of Jesus into the world, so his departure out of it, was graced by the ministry of angels. Events, so important as these, deserved, and, it seems, required, to be so dignified. His birth was, indeed, obscure and mean; and therefore the attendance of those *flaming ministers* might be thought necessary to illustrate and adorn

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adorn it. But his ascension into heaven was an event so full of glory, that it needed not, we may think, any additional lustre to be thrown upon it by this celestial appearance. For what so likely to raise the ideas and excite the admiration of those, who were witnesses of this event, as the fact itself, so sublimely and yet so simply related in these words of the sacred historian—*while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight?*

We may presume, then, that the heavenly host were not sent merely to dignify this transaction; in its own nature so transcendantly awful; but for some further purpose of divine providence. And we find that purpose expressed very plainly in the words of the text; which contain an admonition of great importance, and direct the attention of the disciples to the true end, for which this scene of wonder was displayed before them. For *while they looked stedfastly toward heaven, as he went up, two men stood by them in white apparel; which, also, said, Ye*

men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

The Apostles, we may suppose, were only occupied with the splendor of this event; or they were wholly absorbed in the contemplation of its miraculous nature; or they were speculating, perhaps, on the circumstances of it. They were asking themselves, as they gazed (at least, if they had possessed the philosophic spirit of our days, they might be tempted to ask), how the natural gravity of a human body could permit its ascent in so light a medium—how a cloud, which is but a sheet of air, impregnated with vapours, and made visible by reflected light, could be a fit vehicle of a gross and ponderous substance, and serve for the conveyance of it into the purer regions of æther, which we call *heaven*—or, what need indeed there was, that Jesus should be carried up thither; as if the God, to whom he ascended, were not in every place, alike;

as if there were any such distinction, as high and low, with regard to him; as if all space were not equally inhabited by an infinite spirit; and as if his throne were not in the depths beneath, as well as the heights above, everywhere, in short, without respect to our descriptions of place, where himself existed.

From such a state of mind, or from such meditations as these, the angels divert the Apostles, and call off their attention to a point, which deserved it better, and concerned them more nearly. 'Tis, as if they had said, "Suspend your admiration of this glorious spectacle; suppress all your fond and useless speculations about the causes of this event, and learn from us the proper uses of it. Ye have seen your master thus visibly carried up from you into heaven; by what means, ye need not know, and may well forbear to inquire. But this intelligence receive from us (and it much imports you to be made acquainted with it); this same Jesus, who is thus gone up from

you for a time into heaven, will come again with the same, or even additional glory, to judge the world in righteousness; to see what improvements ye have made of all he has done and suffered for you; and to fix your final doom according to your respective deserts, or miscarriages. Think well of this instruction, which so naturally results from all he said while he was with you on earth, and from what has now passed before your eyes; drop all your other inquiries, and resolve them into this, above all, deserving your best attention, how ye may prepare yourselves for that day, when *he shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*"

The weight of this angelic admonition was enough to put all curious imaginations to flight, and to convince the Apostles then, and all believers at this day, "That their true wisdom consists in adverting to the moral and practical uses of their religion, instead of indulging subtle, anxious, and unprofitable speculations concerning the articles of
it;

it; such especially as are too high, or too arduous for them; such, as they have no real interest in considering, and have no faculties to comprehend."

Permit me then to enforce this conclusion, by applying it to the case of such persons, and especially of such Christians, as have been, at all times, but too ready to sacrifice conduct to speculation; to neglect the ends of religious doctrines, while they busy themselves in nice and fruitless and (therefore, if for no other reason) pernicious inquiries into the grounds and reasons of them.

1. In the days of antient paganism, two points in which religion was concerned, chiefly engaged the attention of their wise men; "GOD," and THE "HUMAN SOUL:" interesting topics both; and the more necessary to be well considered, because those wise men had little or no light on these subjects, but what their own reason might be able to strike out for them. And, had they been contented to derive, from the study of God's

works, *all that may be known of him*, by natural reason, *his eternal power and godhead*, and had then glorified him with such a worship, as that knowledge obviously suggested; or, had they, by adverting to their own internal constitution, deduced the spirituality of the soul, together with its free, moral, and accountable nature, and then had built on these principles, the expectation of a future life, and a conduct in this, suitable to such expectation; had they proceeded thus far in their inquiries, and stopped here, who could have blamed, or, rather, who would not have been ready to applaud, their interesting speculations. But, when, instead of this reasonable use of their understandings in religious matters, they were more curious to investigate the essence of the infinite mind, than to establish just notions of his moral attributes; and to define the nature of the human soul, than to study its moral faculties; their metaphysics became presumptuous and abominable: they reasoned themselves

selves out of a superintending providence, in this world, and out of all hope, in a future; they resolved God into fate, or excluded him from the care of his own creation, and so made the worship of him, a matter of policy, and not of conscience; while, at the same time, they dismissed the Soul into air, or into the spirit of the world, either extinguishing its substance, or stripping it of individual consciousness; and so, in either way, set aside the concern, which it might be supposed to have in a future state, to the subversion of all morality, as well as of religion.

Such was the fruit of pagan ingenuity! The philosophers kept *gazing* upon God, and the Soul, till they lost all just and useful conceptions of either: And thus, as St. Paul says, *they became vain in their imaginations; and their foolish heart was darkened*^a.

If from the Grecian, we turn to the oriental, and what is called, barbaric phi-

^a Rom. i. 21,

losophy,

osophy, what portentous dreams do we find about angels and spirits, or of two opposite principles, contending for mastery in this sublunary world; ingeniously spun out into I know not what fantastic conclusions, which annihilate all sober piety, or subvert the plainest dictates of moral duty? So true is it of all presumptuous inquirers into the invisible things of God, that, *professing themselves wise, they become fools!*

But these extravagancies of the heathen world deserve our pity, and may admit of some excuse. The worst is, that, when heaven had revealed of itself what it saw fit, this irreverent humour of searching into the deep things of God, was not cured, but indeed carried to a greater, if possible, at least to a more criminal excess; as I shall now shew in a slight sketch of the mischiefs, which have arisen, from this audacious treatment even of the divine word.

2. Of the *Jewish* corruptions I shall say nothing, because they did not so directly spring from a licence of speculation in the Rabbins: though

though their readiness in admitting unauthorized traditions, and in giving way to evasive glosses on the Law, had something of the same character in it, and led to the same ill effects.

But when the *Gospel*, that last and best revelation of the divine will, was vouchsafed to mankind, it might be expected, that the most curious would keep themselves within the bounds of modesty and respect: that they would thankfully receive the information imparted to them, would improve it to its right use, and acquiesce in the want of that light, which it was not thought proper to give.

But, no: the same ungoverned curiosity, that had wantoned so long in the schools of pagan philosophy, rioted, with a still more luxuriant extravagance, in the Christian church; as if that unholy flame had caught new strength from the fires of the altar; and the revealed articles of our creed had been only so much fresh fuel to feed and augment it,

Hence,

Hence, in the days of the Apostles themselves, we hear much of men that, *strove about words, to no profit—of profane and vain babblings*, that tended to nothing but *ungodliness*^b, of arrogant reasoners, who *intruded into those things, which they had not seen, vainly puffed up by their fleshly minds*^c, of extravagant speculatists, who allegorized and explained away the fundamental articles of the faith, even the *resurrection* itself^d; which, in the literal sense, was rejected as a gross doctrine, not suited to the apprehensions of wise men.

Thus the seeds of this evil were early sown, and began to shoot up in those rank heresies, of which a full harvest presently appeared.

The Gnostic and Manichæan impieties led the way. Others, of as ill name, followed from all quarters; especially from the sects

^b Tim. ii. 14 and 16.

^c Coloss. ii. 18.

^d 2 Tim. ii. 18.

of pagan philosophy ; which now pressed into the church, and, in their haste, forgot to leave their quibbles and their metaphysicks behind them. The evidences of the Gospel had, indeed, extorted their assent : but how ill prepared they were for the practice of the new religion, sufficiently appeared, when, instead of submitting themselves to the word of God, they would needs torture it into a compliance with their own fancies. Every convert found his own tenets in the doctrine of Jesus ; and would be a Christian only, on the principles of his pagan theology.

Thus the pure and simple faith of the Gospel was adulterated by every folly, which delirious reason could invent and propagate ; till, instead of *joy and peace in believing*, the destined fruits of Christianity *through the power of the holy Ghost**, all was dissonance and distraction ; contentious pride, and fierce inexorable debate.

These mischiefs continued very long ; when Plato, at one time, and Aristotle, at

* Rom. xv. 13.

another,

another, gave the law to the Christian world; and decided in all questions, or rather confounded all, which the subtlety of human wit could extract from the plainest articles of the Christian faith.

Even the barbarous ages could not suppress this fatal ingenuity. The wits of the schoolmen teemed with fresh chimæras, in the shade of their cloysters; as the minds of disturbed visionaries are observed to be more than commonly active and prolific in the dark.

At length Reason grew ashamed of these more than fruitless altercations; and a few divine men, at the Reformation, seemed resolved to take the scriptures for their guide, and to shut up all their inquiries in a frank and full submission to the written word. Still their former bad habits, imperceptibly almost, stuck close to them; for which they had only this excuse to make, that the zeal of their opponents forced them into dispute. Necessity, sharpened their invention: their successes, begot pride: and

persecution, engendered hate. In this way, and by these steps, it was, that the Protestants grew ingenious and dogmatical. In opposition to the church of Rome, they would explain doctrines, of which they had no just ideas; founded on texts of Scripture, which they did not understand. Presently, as was natural for men in their blind situation, they quarrelled among themselves; and their presumption, we may be sure, was not lessened, but increased, by this misadventure. The issue of all these conflicts was, an inundation of dark and dangerous writings, on subjects^f, which confound human reason, and in which religion has no concern.

In process of time, however, these evils were, in part, removed. Philosophers^g examined the scriptures with care, and explained them with reverence: and, what is more, Divines^h became, in the best sense of the word, philosophers. Between them, much light was thrown

^f *Divine prescience, absolute decrees, &c.*

^g Bacon, Boyle, Locke, Newton.

^h Barrow, Clarke, Butler, Warburton, &c.

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on the general scheme of revelation. Its utility, its necessity, was shewn : its sublime views were opened : its evidences were cleared : its doctrines, vindicated : and its authority, maintained. Reason saw to distinguish between its own province, and that of faith : It grew severe in exacting its own rights : and modest in prescribing to those of the revelation itself.

But while men of superior sense were thus intent on reforming the bad theology of former times, the rest were too generally involved in it. They were unwilling to give up their darling habit *of gazing up into heaven* : that is, of framing, or adopting theories, which had neither solidity, nor use ; and of explaining mysteries, which they could not understandⁱ.

ⁱ " It hath been the common disease of Christians from the beginning, not to content themselves with that measure of faith, which God and the Scriptures have expressly afforded us : but out of a vain desire to know more than is revealed, they have attempted to discuss things, of which we can have no light, neither from reason nor revelation." J. HALE's *Works*, Vol. I. p. 125. *Glasg.* 1765.

Nor

Nor was the effect of this folly, merely to disgrace themselves. Christianity was too frequently seen in the false light, in which these rash adventurers had placed it: And men of shallow minds, and libertine principles, were ready enough to take advantage of all their indiscretions. For on this ground only, or chiefly, the various structures of modern infidelity stand. The presumptuous positions of particular men, or churches, are forwardly taken for the genuine doctrines of Christianity: And those positions, being not unfrequently either wholly unintelligible, or even contrary to the plainest reason, the charge of nonsense, or of falshood, is, thus, dexterously transferred on the Gospel itself. And, though the abuse be gross and palpable, yet, when dressed out with a shew of argument, or varnished over with a little popular eloquence, it shall easily pass on ill-inclined, or unwary men.

It is surely time for us to benefit by this sad experience. We, the teachers of religion, should learn, not to be *wise above*

what is written: And you, who would profit in this school, should not think much to restrain your curiosity within these bounds, which, not the Scriptures only, but, right reason prescribes.

For let it not be surmized, that, in deducing this account of the mischiefs, which have sprung from ill-directed inquiries into religion, my purpose is in any degree to discountenance the use of reason in such matters. Christianity, if it be indeed divine, will bear the strictest examination; and it is the prerogative of our protestant profession to support itself on the footing of free inquiry. The way of argument is so far from being hurtful to the cause of revelation, that it is, in truth, the basis and foundation of it. We dishonour, we affront our holy faith, if we believe it hath, or can have any other. Only let us take heed, that Reason do her proper work; and that we do not dream, or fancy, or presume, when we think we reason.

In

Th
things

S E R M O N XI. 211

In the instances, before given, the fault was in concluding without premises, and in arguing without ideas. When men call this *reasoning*, they forget the meaning of the term, as well as mistake the extent of their own faculties. We cannot reason on all subjects; because there are many subjects, which we cannot understand: And by the term, *reasoning*, is only meant an act of the mind, which draws right conclusions from intelligible propositions. The nature of the infinite Being, the mode of his existence, the œconomy of his providence, are inscrutable to us; and probably to the highest angels. Why then intrude into such things, as no man hath seen, or can see? All that remains is, to admit no proposition, which is not clearly revealed; and, for the rest, to admit, on the authority of the revealer, what must be true, though we cannot, in the way of reason, perceive that it is so.

The inutility of all researches into divine things, without a strict adherence to this

well-grounded principle, is apparent; the presumption of them, is ridiculous; but, above all, the mischiefs of them, are deplorable.

Men bewilder themselves, in inextricable difficulties: they disbelieve, on incompetent grounds: they give up the Gospel, and, with it, their best hopes, for the gratification of the idlest vanity: or they mis-spent their time in exploring articles of faith, instead of attending, to the obvious end and use of them.

To return to the text, which led us into these reflexions. The disciples were *looking up into heaven*, when they should have been considering how to follow him thither. Is not our folly the same, or rather is it not more inexcusable, when gazing, with our weak reason, on celestial things, we neglect the ends, for which a glympse of them is afforded to us? For there is not an article of our creed, which may not make us better,
if

S E R M O N XI. 213

if not wiser: And obedience, that is, *faith working by love*, whatever some may think, is of another value in the sight of God, and of higher concern to man, than all knowledge,

S E R M O N XII.

Preached June 23, 1776.

ST. MATTH. xiii. 55, 56.

Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brethren, James and Joses and Simon and Judas? And his sisters, are not they all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him.

WE have, in these words, a striking picture of ENVY; which makes us unwilling to see, or to acknowledge, any pre-eminence in those, whom we have familiarly known and conversed with, and whom we have been long used to regard as our inferiors, or, at most, but on a level with ourselves.

Our

S E R M O N XII. 215

Our Lord's neighbours and countrymen, who had been acquainted with him from his youth, could repeat the names of his whole family, and knew the ordinary condition, in which they lived, were out of patience to think that, so descended and so circumstanced, he should be grown at once into distinction among them, and should be taken notice of for abilities and powers, which they, none of them, possessed.

This temper of mind, I say, is here very graphically expressed; and it operated among the Jews with a more than common malignity, shedding its venom on those, whom not their own industry, but the special favour of heaven had raised above their fellows, and had commissioned to go forth with extraordinary powers (of which they had frequent instances in their history) for the common benefit of themselves and of mankind. Whence it acquired even the authority of a proverbial sentence,—that *a prophet hath no honour in his own country, and in his own house*^a.

^a Matth. xiii. 57.

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But, I mean not to enlarge, at present, on this moral topick. There is *another*, and very important use to be made of these words, which is, to let us see, “how very small a matter will serve to overpower the strongest evidence of our religion, though proposed with all imaginable advantage to us, when we *bate to be reformed*, or, for any other reason, have no mind to be convinced of its truth.”

This strange power of *prejudice* is exemplified in the text, and will deserve our serious consideration.

Our blessed Lord had now given many proofs of the divine virtue, that was lodged in him; and was, therefore, moved, not only by the duty of his office, but, as we may suppose, by that regard which every good man bears to his country, to make a tender of his mercies to those persons, especially, among whom he had been brought up. Accordingly, we are told, that he came to his own city of Nazareth, and *preached in their Synagogue, insomuch that*

the people of that place *were astonished, and said, whence hath this man this wisdom, which appears in his doctrine, and these mighty works,* which we have seen him perform? And then, calling to mind the mean circumstances of his birth and family, before repeated, they expressed their dissatisfaction, or, as the text says, *were offended in him.*

But, were those circumstances a reason for rejecting a *doctrine*, which astonished them with its wisdom; and *works*, which they owned to be *mighty*, and above the common power of man? Rather, sure, the opposite conduct was to be expected; and, because they knew certainly, from the mean extraction and education of him who taught and did these things, that he had no means of *acquiring* his abilities (if they were at all to be acquired) in an ordinary way, they ought, methinks, to have had their minds impressed with a full assurance, that they were owing, as they were by himself ascribed, to the power of God.

But,

But, no: rather than admit a conclusion, which hurt their pride, and crossed their foolish prejudices, they stifle the strongest conviction of their own minds; and resolve not to receive a prophet, whom they had long desired and expected, who came to them with all the credentials of a prophet, and with the offer of what they most wanted, the remission of their sins, and the inestimable gift of eternal life. And all this, because the prophet was *the son of a carpenter*, in their own town, and because his *brethren and sisters*, persons of a mean condition, *were all with them*.

When we contemplate such a conduct, as this, we are ready to say, that it sprung from a more than common perverseness of character, and that the people of Nazareth were more unreasonable and sottish, as the common proverb made them to be, than the rest of *Israel*^b.

Yet, if we turn our thoughts on the other tribes and cities of that nation, on the

^b John i. 46.

inhabitants

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inhabitants of Judæa, and even of Jerusalem, we shall find, that they reasoned no better than the men of Nazareth had done; and discovered equal, indeed, much the same prejudices as those, by which our Lord's own countrymen had been misled.

For, what else was it to say, as they commonly did, that *no prophet could come out of Galilee*^c; that he could not be the Messiah, because his disciples were illiterate fishermen^d, and not Scribes and Pharisees; because none of their rulers believed on him^e; because he conversed, sometimes, with publicans and sinners^f; because he did not observe their minute ceremonies or traditions^g; because he manifested his divine power in healing the sick and casting out devils, and not in breaking to pieces the Roman empire and restoring the temporal

^c John vii. 52.

^d Acts iv. 13. See Whitby on the place.

^e John vii. 48.

^f Matth. ix. 11.

^g Matth. xv. 2.

kingdom

kingdom of Israel^h; because—but I need not instance in more particulars: Universally, the Jews, of all places and denominations, rejected their Lord and Saviour for reasons, the most absurd and trivial; for reasons, that came from the heart, and not the head, which shewed they were under the power of some contemptible prejudice, and would yield to no evidence, unless that was complied with.

Still, “the Jews, in general, you will say, were unlike other people. Tell us, how the polished Heathens reasoned on the subject of Christ’s mission; and whether, when the Gospel was addressed to them, they opposed it on the footing of those senseless prejudices, which you have enough disgraced.”

Luckily, I have it in my power to accept this challenge; and to shew you, on the best authority, that those men of enlightened minds and renowned wisdom were

^h Luke xxiv. 21.

as weak in their sophisms, and as childish in their cavils against the new religion, as the Jews themselves.

We read in the Acts of the Apostlesⁱ, that St. Paul came to Ephesus, a rich, learned, idolatrous city of Asia; that he applied himself more especially to the instruction of its Gentile inhabitants; *disputing daily, for two years together, in the school of one Tyrannus*, a teacher of rhetorick, or philosophy, as we may suppose, and a convert to the faith of Jesus. That his success was great, we may conclude, both from his long residence, and from *the special miracles*, which he wrought, among them. Yet, when *the word of God had grown mightily and prevailed, a certain silver-smith, who made silver shrines* for the Goddesses of the place, had credit enough with this well-instructed city, because its trade was likely to suffer by the downfall of idolatry, to raise such an uproar among the people, that the Apostle's

ⁱ Acts xix.

labours were, at once, overturned by this powerful argument; and he, himself, compelled to leave them to their old infatuations: which was much such treatment; as Jesus himself had received from the Gadarenes; who, because he had permitted the devils, ejected out of one of their people, to enter into a herd of swine, and to destroy them, would not be saved at this expence, and required him, but civilly indeed, *to depart out of their coasts*. Now, was that *craft*, or this *husbandry*, a matter to be put in competition with the saving of their souls, which they had reason to expect from the preaching of Paul and Jesus? Or, is it not clear, that a petty interest, that is, a sordid *prejudice*, prevailed against the most precious hopes, supported by the fullest evidence?

But these were *prejudices* of the ignorant vulgar. Let us see, then, what success St. Paul had in a nobler scene; among wits and sages, men of refined sense and reason, in the head-quarters of politeness and civility, in the eye of Greece itself, in one
7 word,

word, Athens^k. Here, the great Apostle, who had the charity, and the ability, to *make himself all things to all men*, encountered their ablest philosophers; reasoning with them, even before their revered court of Areopagus, on their own favourite topics of *God, and the Soul*, in a strain of argument, which was clearly unanswerable; and concluding his weighty apology with *Jesus and the Resurrection*. But what was the effect of all this truth on the minds of these liberal heathens? Why the text says—*when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some* (that is, the Epicureans) *mocked*; and why? because their philosophy admitted no future state: while *others* (the Stoics) *said, We will hear thee again of this matter*; but, for as poor a reason, as the other, because their philosophy taught I know not what of a certain renovation of the world, which, for the credit of their sect, they were half inclined to confound

^k Acts xvii.

with

with the Christian resurrection. You see, in both parties, the power of prejudice; where yet the occasion was the most interesting, the hearers the most capable, the ability of the speaker, independently of his assumed inspiration, unquestionably great, and where the conclusion, (so carelessly dismissed) was, after all, a question of FACT, which had no dependence on the fanciful tenets of either party.

I should weary you and myself, should I carry on this deduction through the following ages of the Christian church; and shew, as I might easily do, that the ablest men of science, who opposed Christianity, did it on grounds no better than those of these Athenian sophists. We see what these grounds were, in the fragments, that remain to us, of many antient unbelievers¹, men, the most acute and learned of their times; while yet every man of sense, that now reads and considers their objections, will

¹ Celsus, Porphyry, Julian.

own,

own, whether he be himself a Christian or not, that they are altogether weak and frivolous, and have the force not so much of sound, or even colourable arguments; as of faint and powerless prepossessions against unwelcome truth.

I shall only instance in *one* of these prepossessions, which you will think prodigious. The Roman empire, labouring under its own vices, and many *physical* evils, which then lay heavy upon it, experienced, in the fourth century, that reverse of fortune, which, in its turn, the greatest nations must expect. But by this time Christianity had spread itself through all the provinces, and was become the religion of the state. In these circumstances, the Heathens, very generally, not the rabble only, but the gravest and wisest of the Heathens, ascribed these disasters to the abolition of idolatry; and thought it an unanswerable argument against the faith of Jesus, that it did not maintain their empire in that degree of splendour and prosperity, to which, in the

days of pagan worship, it had happily been raised. And this miserable superstition, which we now only pity, or, perhaps, smile at, made so great an impression on the minds of men, that the greatest of the ancient fathers, and particularly St. Austin, were scarce able, with all their learning and authority, to bring it into contempt.

Such was the power of *ancient* prejudice against the Christian religion. But I hasten to set before you, in few words, what its tyranny has been in *later* times.

The accidental and temporary commotions, which reformed religion produced in our western world, furnished in the minds of many, a notable *argument* against the cause of protestantism, which, when taken up and improved, as it soon was, by state-policy, had, indeed, a fatal influence on its success. But, even as to Christianity itself, that day-spring of knowledge, which broke upon us at the Reformation, and, as they say, has been brightening from that time to this, could not disperse those

¹ In his famous book, *De civitate Dei*.

phantoms

phantoms of prejudice, which are for ever haunting the human mind.

Men, who piqued themselves on their sagacity, presently started up, and said, that, because popery had been found to be an imposture, Christianity was so too; and because the legendary tales of the cloysters had been convicted of falshood, that the Scriptures themselves deserved but little regard. And, when afterwards these suspicions gave way to sober criticism and learned inquiry, *prejudices* still arose, in various shapes, against the EVIDENCES, and the DOCTRINES of the Gospel-Revelation. We were told, that the *prophecies* proved nothing, because some of them were too obscure, and others too plain. Could both these objections come from the oracle, Reason? Or, is it so much as likely, that either of them did so? when, for any thing it could tell, both the clearness, and the obscurity might be suitable to the occasion, and each, be fit, in its place. Then, again, there were others bold enough to deny the existence of *miracles*, not, because many

have been forged, but because none can be true. Was this, too, the voice of Reason? or, is not St. Paul's appeal to common sense enough to disgrace this fancy to the end of the world—*Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that GOD should raise the dead*^a? God, who surely has power to do this, or other miracles, when his wisdom sees fit.

The contents of the Gospel have also been treated, I do not say with as little respect, but with as little shew of reason and argument, as the evidences of it.

For instance, it was current, not long ago, that "Christianity was as old as the Creation;" the meaning of which wise saying was, that Christianity could not be true, because the moral part of it was such, as nature taught, and had at all times been able to discover by its own light. Admit the fact: what follows? That therefore a divine reve-

^a Acts vi. 8.

lation needs not repeat and could not occasionally enforce the laws of nature. Is reason, pure unmixed reason, accustomed to trifle at this rate?

But the complaint now is, that nature does not teach the *doctrinal* part of the Gospel. And what then? Was it not equally to be expected that what concerns the essence and counsels and dispensations of God should be a secret to nature, unassisted by revelation, as that our practical moral duties should lie open to its view? And, if the force of this question be not generally felt, there is no doubt, I think, but it will, in a short time. For, it is to be observed of all these idle cavils, that they presently vanish one after another; and, when each has had its day, is, thenceforth, exploded even by unbelievers themselves.

But, 'tis time to come to a conclusion of this matter. The purpose of all I have said is, only, this, to shew, what weak and idiot prejudices have, at all times, been taken

up against Christianity, and how generally they have been mistaken by the acutest of its enemies, for reasons of much weight.

And, if all, who hear me, be led by this experience, to suspect the infirmity of their own minds; if, having seen the disgraceful issue of so many fancies, which for a time have passed for shrewd *arguments*, but have, afterwards, appeared to be nothing more than childish *prejudices*, they can be brought to mistrust those, that occur to themselves; if, in a word, they can be induced to question the pertinence and force of what they too easily consider in the light of objections to Christianity, and to argue soberly and cautiously at least, if they will needs try their skill in arguing against it; the end, I have in view, will be answered, and neither my pains, nor your attention, will be thrown away on this discourse.

SERMON

XIX [231M] T I 6 111

S E R M O N XIII.

Preached Feb. 4, 1776.

JAMES iv. 7.

—*Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.*

THAT there are Angels and Spirits, good and bad ; that, at the head of these last, there is ONE, more considerable and malignant, than the rest, who in the form, or under the name, of a *Serpent*, was deeply concerned in the fall of man, and whose *head*, as the prophetic language is, the Son of man was, one day, to *bruise* ; that this evil spirit, though that prophecy be, in part, completed, has not yet received his death's wound, but is still

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permitted,

permitted, for ends unsearchable to us, and in ways which we cannot particularly explain, to have a certain degree of power in this world, hostile to its virtue and happiness, and sometimes exerted with too much success; all this is so clear from Scripture, that no believer, unless he be, first of all, *spoiled by philosophy and vain deceit*, can possibly entertain a doubt of it.

The subject, indeed, in its full extent, cannot be discussed, at this time, nor conveniently, perhaps, in this place. But it may not be improper to make some general reflexions upon it; such, as may serve to rectify your APPREHENSIONS of the doctrine itself, which, as I said, is truly scriptural, and to suggest, at the same time, the MORAL AND RELIGIOUS USES, we ought to make of it.

I. An opinion prevailed in the east very early, and was probably derived from some still more antient tradition of the fall, corrupted, and misunderstood, that two, equally

equally great and independent beings, a good and a bad, shared the government of the world between them; that these beings, of directly opposite characters, carried on a perpetual war with each other, crossed each other's designs and operations, and, as either prevailed, produced the good or evil, the happiness or misery, of this life.

This opinion was, afterwards, taken up by some, who called themselves Christians; and was especially applied by those, who loved to philosophize (as too many did, and, at all times, have been prone to do) on the secrets of divine providence, to the solution of that great question, concerning the *origin of natural and moral evil*.

Now, to this notion some countenance, it is thought, has been given by the scriptural doctrine of the Devil, who is spoken of, as *the Prince of this world*^a, as *the Prince of the power of the air*^b, as *the God of the*

^a John xii. 31.

^b Ephes. ii. 2.

World,

World^c, and in other terms of the like sort, denoting as well the *power*, as malignity, of this evil Being.

But, though these terms are, some of them, very strong, and certainly imply, not the existence only, but the extensive agency and influence, of this wicked Spirit, yet there is no pretence or colour for supposing that anything like an equality to the God of heaven and earth, or an independency upon him, was intended to be expressed by them. For it is manifest, that no writings in the world exalt our ideas of that God so high, or set forth his supreme irresistible and sovereign dominion in so strong and decisive terms, as the Jewish and Christian scriptures. And with regard to the particular evil being under consideration, he is represented as *trembling*^d at the very apprehension of the omnipotent creator, as sentenced by his justice^e, and reserved for the execution

^c 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^d James ii. 19.

^e Gen. iii. 14, 15.

of it^f; as exercising a partial, a precarious, a limited power in this world, working only in the *children of disobedience*^g, and in them, consequently; no longer than they continue to deserve that character; and baffled in his attempts, not only by the son of God, but by the *resistance*^h, by the *prayers*ⁱ, by the *faith*^k, of Christians; as a rebel indeed, yet a rebel cast out^l and disabled^m, and compelled to be an instrument, like all other things, in the hands of the Almightyⁿ.

But nothing shews more clearly, how abhorrent the spirit of Christianity is from the Manichæan doctrine, than the care that is taken throughout the Gospel-history to set forth the triumphs of Christ over the kingdom of Satan, in *casting out devils*; of which

^f Matth. xxv. 41.

^g Eph. ii. 2.

^h James iv. 7.

ⁱ Matth. xvii. 21.

^k 1 Pet. v. 9.

^l John xii. 31.

^m Luke x. 18.

ⁿ Job. i. 12.

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the instances are so many, and so circumstantially described, as if our Lord's main or sole purpose had been to expose and explode that great impiety. He not only, himself, commanded, by a word, the devils to go out of the possessed, who accordingly obeyed him, and, in departing, deprecated that power^o, which they knew he had over them; but he, likewise, gave the same authority to his disciples, who went forth with his commission, and *returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us, through thy name^r*. On which occasion, *he said unto them*, as exulting in his dominion over the enemy, and in the rapid, instantaneous, irresistible effect of it, *I beheld Satan, as lightning, fall from heaven^s*.

Thus much may suffice to shew, that, though the Gospel affirms the existence of evil spirits, and of one eminently so, yet

^o Matth. viii. 21.

^r Luke ix. 1. and x. 17.

^s Luke x. 18.

that

that it gives no countenance to the doctrine of the two principles; as if the evil one were independent of the good, or that Satan could have the madness to think of rivalling the power of God, and of entering into a direct formal contest, as it were, with the Almighty. Whatever of this sort has been said, or insinuated, contradicts the express testimony, indeed, the whole tenour, of holy scripture, and is nothing but poetry, or misrepresentation.

2. Still, on the face of that account, which Scripture itself gives, it must be owned, that the power of Satan is great and even dreadful.

That he was permitted, in our Saviour's time, to vex, and, in various ways, torment the BODIES of men, is clear from the number of *possessions*, we read of in the Gospel; which though some have laboured to explain away (as they have, indeed, the personality of the Devil himself) by reducing what is said of his agency to a mere figure of speech, yet I do not find that their
attempts

attempts have, hitherto, been, or are likely to be, successful.

That he was, also, permitted to lay such trains, and contrive such measures, as had a fatal effect, sometimes, on the FORTUNES of men, not of those only, who were the immediate instruments of his malice, but of good and innocent men, who stood at a distance from him, we see by the sad catastrophe of that council, which *he put into the heart of Judas to betray his master*^{*}; first, in the untimely death of the traitor himself, and then, by a series of connected events, in the crucifixion of the holy Jesus; and by several other instances. And, that he still retains this last power, as formidable as it truly is, must be concluded, if it be true, as we shall presently see it is, that he insinuates himself into the minds of bad men, and is concerned in exciting and promoting their wicked purposes. But, whether he be allowed to tyrannize over the bodies of men,

^{*} John xiii, 2.

is more problematical. That, for any thing we know, he may operate in the way of *possession*, I do not see on what certain grounds any man can deny: that he does so, I would not affirm, because the Scripture, our only guide as to what respects the agency of spirits, is silent in that matter. But the inquiry is of the less moment, because, since the gift of *discerning* spirits hath ceased in the church, we have no means of distinguishing between *possessions* and *natural disorders*; and, because, if we had, there is no known cure, or antidote, for them.

Had this been considered, all the mischiefs which have arisen from the trade of witchcraft and diabolism, would have been prevented. For they have proceeded, not from the supposed possibility of possessions, but from a fraudulent pretence of knowing when they take place, and from a superstitious belief of certain charms or spells, which may be applied, with effect, to the removal of them. Whereas, the fact is not cognizable by us, the symptoms, whether

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of the natural disorder, or of the prater's natural infliction, being equivocal; and Christianity acknowledges no power in words, or ceremonies, to exorcise evil spirits. The only exorcism, which is now permitted to Christians, is that of faith and repentance, that is, of a good life; which every man may, and should apply, when it is needful, to his own case, and which, in that application, can surely do no hurt to himself, or others.

And, with this explanation, I leave the matter of *possessions*. As I have no authority to affirm, that there *are*, now, any such, so neither may I presume to say, with confidence, that there are *not* any.

But, then, with regard to the influence of evil spirits at this day upon the souls of men, I shall take leave to be a great deal more peremptory. For this influence is so constantly supposed in the Gospel; there are so many admonitions, cautions, advices, relating to it; there are so many warnings given us by Christ and his Apostles against
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S E R M O N XIII. 241

the snares, the wiles, the devices, the depths, of Satan, and these, conveyed in the form of general precepts, plainly calculated for the use of Christians in all ages; it is so expressly said, in Christ's own parable of the sower, that the *tares*, that is, bad men, *are sown by the devil*, and that this husbandry will be carried on by him to the end of the world; it is so apparent, that his empire over bad men is exercised in the way of temptation and seduction, by putting bad purposes into their minds, and filling their hearts with corrupt imaginations and intentions; it is, besides, so evident that we are continually in danger of this temptation, by that clause in the Lord's prayer, the daily prayer of all Christians—*deliver us from the evil one**—for such is the proper sense of these words, which we translate, *deliver us from evil*—All this, I say, is so manifest to every one who reads the scriptures, that, if we respect their authority,

* ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ Matth. vi. 13.

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the question, concerning the reality of demonic influence upon the minds of men, is clearly determined.

Nay, there are many instances, in history, and common life, of prodigious, almost unimaginable wickedness, strangely conceived and executed, which, if they do not prove this doctrine, in the way of sensible experience, perfectly fall in, and harmonize with it. It seems, as if the souls of some men were demoniacal, as the bodies of others have been. Let me appeal to yourselves. Suppose that a person, duly commissioned for that purpose, had dislodged as many devils from Nero or Cæsar Borgia, as our Saviour did from the poor unhappy man of Gadara, would this exorcism have surprized you more in the former case, than the latter? or would not this miracle have furnished us with a better account, than we can now give, of the transcendant wickedness, which *possessed* the hearts of those monsters?

Indeed, in the simpler ages, our forefathers, who read the scriptures, and believed

lieved what they read, constantly ascribed any crime, with which they charged another, to *the instigation of the devil*; as you may see from the language of those forms, which are used, in criminal prosecutions to this day: and, if those charges be now considered as *mere forms*, it was not always so; and a better reason will be required, than can be presently given, why any Christian should so conceive of them.

3. But to all this it will be said, “that the doctrine, here laid down, as scriptural, is strange and incredible; that it makes the virtue and happiness of men depend on others, and not on themselves; that it supposes a power, adverse to the great creator and governor, and able, on many occasions, to prevail against him, which degrades both his *sovereignty* and his *wisdom*; and that, above all, it represents weak simple men as exposed to the practices of great and subtle tempters, which overturn all our ideas of the divine *justice* and *goodness*.”

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The objection might be enforced in more words, but you see the drift and force of it. Now, in answer, it would be enough to say, that, let the difficulties be what they will, the doctrine is scriptural. But then, as to those difficulties themselves, I must further say, that they are not peculiar to this doctrine, as revealed in scripture, but bear equally against the natural doctrine of God's moral government.

For do we not see that we all of us depend in a great measure, for the virtue and happiness we possess, on the conduct of others? Can we look about us, and not perceive an order of beings, I mean, *wicked men*, opposing themselves to the will of God, traversing his righteous purposes, and prevailing, for a time at least, against his primary intentions? Do they not pervert, corrupt, destroy multitudes every day; and are not the weak and simple permitted to fall into the snares of the wise and crafty? Do not these things evidently take place in our world, and is it thought any derogation from

from the attributes of God that they should be allowed to do so? Are not men, too oft, a sort of devils to each other, and can we wonder that vice and misery are much in the power of such agents? Yes, but *spiritual unseen* agents!—Does that make any mighty difference? Is it necessary to suppose that *spirits*, of whatever rank, are privileged from abusing their free-will, and from being perverse and wicked, as we see men are? And, what if they are *unseen*? Have we reason to expect, from the present constitution of things, that we should suffer only from the practices of known and visible tempters? As if much of the vice and wretchedness of this life did not come upon us by surprize, as we may say, and when we think little of the cause, or the agent! A lye, flies in the dark, and misleads many into errors, and even crimes. A libel, gets abroad, nobody knows from whom, and yet shall tempt, perhaps drive, unwary multitudes, into rebellion. How many plots of wickedness are laid and succeed, when the

plotter is out of sight and not so much as suspected! Nay, a certain cast of mind, or temperament of body, things, wholly unknown and unthought of by most men, shall, without great care and circumspection, be fatal to our virtue. Even the air, we breathe, (which, like the *prince of the power of the air*, is to us invisible) has a secret, and yet, sometimes, powerful influence on our passions. And shall we still disbelieve the seduction of an evil spirit, because he steals insensibly upon us?

But the true answer to all objections of this sort, whether men or devils be the tempters, is, that neither shall prevail, but by our own fault, by some carelessness, or wilful corruption of our own hearts, which are always sufficiently admonished, that the enemy is at hand, when evil thoughts, however produced, begin to stir in them. Then is the time to watch, and *resist*: and our resistance, the text tells us, will not be in vain. And what though legions of spirits lay siege to us! We may call *more than twelve*

twelve legions of angels, even the holy spirit of God himself, to our assistance, if we please; for greater is HE THAT IS IN US, than he that is in the world^t. So faithful is God, after all our impious surmises and distrust of his gracious providence, who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, though Satan himself be the tempter, but will with the temptation also, if we be careful to do our part, make a way for us to escape^u.

4. And, this being the case, all objections to the doctrine here inculcated, fall to the ground; so that I have only to remind you, in two words, (for the time will not allow many) of the *moral and religious uses*, we ought to make of it.

I shall but mention ONE, of each sort,

1. In a RELIGIOUS view, the belief of this doctrine is of the utmost importance: for the whole scheme of Redemption is founded upon it. For *therefore* Christ came

^t 1 John iv. 4.

^u 1 Cor. x. 13.

into the world, and suffered upon the cross, *that, through death, as St. Paul says, he might destroy him, that had the power of death, that is, the DEVIL^x. And, universally, for this purpose* (I quote the words of St. John) *the son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the DEVIL^y. It concerns us, then, infinitely, to take heed lest, by denying, or questioning, or explaining away, the existence and agency of the evil spirit, we subvert the foundation of our faith, detract from the glory of our Saviour's passion, and unthankfully despise the riches of his goodness in dying for us: nay, and lest we blaspheme the Holy Ghost; who was given to help our infirmities^z, to strengthen us with might in the inner man^a, and therefore to save us from the power of that spirit, which worketh in the children of disobedience^b.*

^x Heb. ii. 14.

^y St. John iii. 8.

^z Rom. viii. 26.

^a Eph. xiv. 16.

^b Eph. xi. 2.

2. In a MORAL view it is, also, of great importance, that we entertain right notions on this subject.

I know that the *world* and the *flesh* are powerful enemies enough, and that we need not wish to signalize our courage by a contest with any *other*.

But if there *be* another, we are concerned to know what our danger is, and to provide against it. Security is generally fatal; especially when the strength of the enemy is greater than we take it to be. Therefore, let us learn from scripture, what that strength is; and let us use all diligence in *resisting* (as we have long since engaged to do) not the *world* and the *flesh* only, but, also, the DEVIL. This is the advice of the text—*Resist the DEVIL*. And this, too, is the advice of the Apostle Peter—*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the DEVIL, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*^c (words, by the

^c 1 Peter v. 8.

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way, which put the *personality* of the tempter out of all question); *Whom resist*, says he, *stedfast in the FAITH*; under the protection of which shield, *we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of THE WICKED*^d.

^d τὴν πονηρίαν Eph. vi. 16.

SERMON

S E R M O N XIV.

Preached March 29, 1772.

PROV. xvi. 6.

*By the fear of the Lord, men depart from
evil.*

ALL the authority of Solomon's name and wisdom will, I doubt, be no more than sufficient to procure respect to this observation; which some may consider as a *trite and vulgar truth*, scarce deserving their regard; while others, perhaps, will not so much as allow it to be a truth at all, but indeed a *vulgar mistake*, arising out of the narrow views of ignorant or superficial declaimers. It may be slighted by one set
of

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of men, as conveying *no* information, and by another, as conveying a *wrong* one.

Let me attempt then to rescue the sacred text from both these imputations. Permit me to shew you, that the observation, it contains, is neither so generally received, as to make all further discourse about it frivolous and unnecessary; nor yet, on the other hand, of so questionable a nature, as to justify the scorn with which it is sometimes rejected.

L To those, who are such fastidious hearers of the word, as to disregard an important truth, because repeatedly inforced upon them, I might reply that such truths can never be insisted upon too much, that our duty is to inculcate them, *in season, and out of season.*

But the fact is mistaken. We are so far from nauseating our hearers, with a too common and superfluous truth, when we remind them perpetually, that, *by the fear of God, men depart from evil*, that, on the contrary,

contrary, very many want to be informed, or at least convinced, of it.

What the text affirms, is, that the *fear of God*, or the RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLE, is the proper guide of life. But look now into the *world*, at large: there the acknowledged rule of life, is FASHION. Look into the *civil or political* world: there the boasted rule of life, is THE LAW OF THE MAGISTRATE. Look into the *learned* world: there too commonly the only rule of life is each man's own reason, or what he proudly calls PHILOSOPHY.

And will it now be said that *the fear of God*, is a principle too stale and too unquestioned to be discoursed upon and recommended to you from this place, when we see so large and so considerable a part of the world actuated by one or other of these different and discordant principles? But neither

II. Is the truth, though far enough from being generally received, so slightly grounded as to justify any man in the contempt of it.

It

It is a truth, taught of God, and revered by all wise men. It has nature, and reason, and experience on its side ; and is only combated by the folly, the short-sighted policy, or lastly, the pride, of half-thinking and presumptuous men.

For to give, now, the godless principles, I before mentioned, a short and separate examination,

1. Tell *the man of the world*, that the religious principle is that by which alone he ought to govern himself, and you are presently told of the power and prerogatives of FASHION.

“ *The fear of God*, he will say, may be the proper rule of monks and hermits ; but must be qualified, at least, in many respects, by such as live in the world and mix in the society of it. They who have to converse with mankind, are to accommodate themselves to their notions and practices : they are to think with the rest of the world, or at least they are to act with them : they are to
found

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found their moral systems on the liberal and enlarged basis of approved use or custom. Their observation of human life must inform them of the ways that men take to conciliate the good will of their fellows, to prosecute their own advantages in the world, and to acquire the confidence and esteem of that society, in which they are stationed. What they find to be the rule of others, must be a rule to themselves. To do otherwise is not weakness, only: It is, besides, arrogance, incivility, inhumanity."

All this is thought plausible by some men; and taken together, it must be owned, forms a very easy and commodious system: but how consistent with conscience, with duty, and with common sense, they will do well to consider. For if *fashion* only be to regulate our conduct in all cases, I ask not what becomes of piety, but of humanity itself, I mean of those offices which we owe to others and to ourselves, and which reason dictates to us in every situation. Custom,

you

you will say, is practical reason. But what! To be led blind-fold by the prevailing practice, whatever it be, what is it but to renounce our intelligent nature, and to live at hazard, and without reason? Further still: If it be sufficient to do as we see others *creditably* do, without examining any farther, we shall often find ourselves involved, I do not say in the most irrational, the most inconsistent, but the most horrid practices. Then, killing with malice and with forethought, if the point of honour prevail, will be no *murder*: And, adultery, if the law of politeness so ordain, shall hide its atrocious nature under the mask of *gallantry*: Then, shall society at large become a scene of fraud and rapine; good faith, shall be termed *simplicity*, and fair dealing, *folly*.

Go now, and say that *the fear of God* is a needless restraint on free spirits; and count the advantages which ye have reason to promise to yourselves, from acknowledging no other guide of life, but *imperious fashion*!

2. A graver set of men come next, and tell us, “ That *fashion* is indeed a very uncertain guide of life : But that LAW, the result of the public wisdom, armed with the public force, is an adequate rule of human action ; that the legislator’s province is to enact such salutary laws, and the magistrate’s duty, to carry them into execution, as shall be sufficient to secure the peace and order of society ; And that every other rule of life is at once unnecessary and ineffectual : *unnecessary*, because the interests of virtue are amply provided for by the wisdom of law ; and *ineffectual*, because no other principle has force enough to exact obedience : That, in particular, *the fear of God* is too remote a consideration to restrain the tumultuous passions of men, which are held in subjection by nothing but the instant terrors of civil justice ; in a word, that where the law of the state is duly enforced, there is no need of other restraints ; and that, lastly, to lay a stress on *the religious principle* is to weaken the operation of law,

as it opens a door to fanaticism and superstition."

This plea of the politician receives an apparent force from this certain truth, That law is indeed of indispensable necessity, and that the general virtue and happiness of a people cannot be maintained without it. We join him therefore very cordially in this encomium on civil justice; but must remind him, withal, that neither is the religious principle superseded by it, nor can civil justice itself maintain its due course, without the support of the religious principle: That, when the authority of law has done its best, there will be much for religion to controul and regulate; *much*, that is not within the reach of law, and without its jurisdiction: That *the fear of the Lord* penetrates deeper and farther, than the sword of the magistrate; and that even, within his own province, all his policy and all his power will take a very imperfect effect, without the concurrence of a higher principle; as he himself is abundantly convinced from
the

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the necessity of fortifying his own most important constitutions, by the religion of an oath; which is nothing else but an appeal to the fear of God, under a sense of its being a needful supplement to the fear of the magistrate.

Yet society, they say, is entirely upheld by the authority of law; at least, the world may go on very well, by virtue of that only. Yes; It may go on, as we see it does, full of open violence, which all its terrors cannot restrain; and of secret frauds, for which it cannot so much as project a remedy: It may go on, indeed, but polluted by vices of all sorts, which are not the objects of law, and even by crimes, which are often too strong for it: It may go on, indeed, till the religious principle be quite effaced from the minds of men (if we may have leave, for a moment, to put so desperate, and, thank God, so impossible a case) but, when that dreadful time comes, society itself, with all its bulwark of laws, must inevitably be swept away with it.

Universal history bears testimony to this awful truth ; there being no account of any state on the face of the earth, which could ever support itself in general virtue, or general happiness, by the mere force of its civil institutions. And how should it be otherwise, when the fear of God is requisite to enforce the law, as well as to observe it ; to supply the state with faithful magistrates, as well as with obedient subjects ?

If then this vital principle of religion, so necessary to the conservation of all states, cannot be kept free from some mixture of fanaticism or superstition, we are surely to endure the inconvenience, as we can, rather than put the interests of society to hazard by suspending them all on the weak and false supports of an irreligious policy.

3. Lastly, the PHILOSOPHER'S plea, though specious at first sight, is of all others the weakest. For *fashion*, if it chance to be on the side of virtue, will be punctually followed : And the sword of the *magistrate* can, in part, at least, enforce obedience.

But

But what coercive power is there in *philosophy*? It may see and determine right: but who, or what shall compell this supreme directress of life to observe its own determinations? “The fitness, it may be said, of those determinations themselves; the very reason of the thing being the proper restraint of reasonable natures.” Still the question returns, What if I am disposed to throw off this restraint? I act against conviction, indeed, and am self-condemned, which to a liberal mind is no small punishment. But look into the world, and see if that punishment be sufficient to induce the bulk of mankind, nay the gross body of philosophers themselves, *to depart from evil*.

And what, after all, is this magnified reason? One man admits no other rule of life but *abstract truth*, or what he calls *the differences of things*: Another, will hear of none, but an instinctive *moral sense*: And a third, entrenches himself within the narrow circle of *private happiness*. These several systems have been laid down, each in

its turn, as the only proper basis of moral action ; But could the patrons of them be made to agree in any one ; or could their several schemes be made, as perhaps they might, to consist together ; still, they could only serve to acquaint us what the nature of virtue is ; they do but slenderly provide for the practice of it.

Let the philosophers, then, debate this matter among themselves. It is enough for *us* to learn of Solomon, *to fear God* : To fear HIM, who is everywhere and essentially present ; who is conscious to all our actions and all our thoughts ; from whose knowledge there is no escape, from whose justice there is no appeal, and to whose power there is no hope, or possibility of resistance.

With this principle, an unquestioned principle of reason, if there be any, deeply rooted in the mind, we have indeed an adequate rule of life ; or, what is better, a controuling motive to put in practice whatever rule of life we chuse to follow. Moral systems, taken by themselves, are poor
ineffective

ineffective things ; Even virtue's self is but a name, till the religious principle be infused into her. Then it is, that she lives and acts, and by her powerful influence inclines the hearts of men *to depart from evil.*

Nor let any man apprehend that this religious fear will degrade, or servilize his virtue. To be free from sin, and only the servants of God, is the truest and noblest liberty.

Dismissing, then, all other rules of life, let us adhere to that, which Solomon prescribes to us. It had been venerable from any hands, but comes with an extraordinary grace and propriety from HIM, who delivers it. So that none of the parties, concerned in this discourse, can excuse themselves from paying a peculiar deference to his judgement.

I. The MEN OF THE WORLD can have no pretence for declining this determination. The author of it is no obscure sordid moralist, whose views of life are confined to a cloyster or a cottage. He

addresses them from the throne of Israel, when it was the pride of the east ; and from the center of a court, which he had made the envy of the surrounding nations. The followers of fashion will then act but agreeably to their own principles, if they respect the example of such a court, and the authority of its sovereign.

2. The POLITICIANS will reflect, that their instructor is himself a great magistrate, consummate in the arts of government; who yet could find no secret, but that of *the fear of God*, by which he could reign securely himself, or promote the real welfare and prosperity of his people. With what complacency do they sometimes urge a political aphorism, taken from Aristotle! *But a greater than Aristotle, is here.*

3. Lastly, to you, the sages of the world, who are, or account yourselves PHILOSOPHERS, nothing can be so respectable to you, as the authority of ONE, whose name is the name itself of wisdom ; of ONE, who, like
4 you,

you, *had given his heart to know wisdom^a*; who had an understanding, at least, equal to yours, and an experience of life, far greater. Yet even HE delivers it, as the result of all his knowledge, *That by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.*

It is indeed this principle only, which gives its proper direction and integrity to every other. It controuls Fashion; supplies the defects of Law; and enforces the conclusions of Reason. It rectifies all our systems, and gives sense and solidity to all our speculations.

To conclude, Let us all be wise enough to reverence the plain doctrine of the text, and to act upon it: The rather, as that doctrine is not only just and reasonable in itself, but proceeds from one, whom the spirit of God had been pleased to inform with celestial wisdom.

^a Eccles. i. 17. and vii. 25.

S E R M O N XV.

Preached May 31, 1772.

I COR. vi. 12.

All things are lawful unto me; but all things are not expedient: All things are lawful for me; but I will not be brought under the power of any.

IT would be taking up too much of your time, and of this discourse, to explain minutely the occasion of these words, and the connection they have with the general argument of this chapter. Let it suffice to say, that they are introduced as an answer to something which the Corinthian Christians did, or might alledge for their neglect of the

the instructions, given them by the Apostle. We may conceive them to speak to this effect—"What you enjoin us so strictly to avoid, is not one of those practices which can be deemed unlawful: it is not, as we conceive, condemned by the law of nature, certainly, not by the law of that society to which we belong. Now in matters of this kind, there is no need of advice or direction: the things being indifferent in themselves, we may do as we please, and we are disposed, in the present case, to make use of our Christian liberty."

To this plea, or suggestion, the Apostle replies in the text: "Admitting, says he, the truth of what ye alledge for yourselves, it does not follow that I may not properly and usefully direct your conduct, in the present case. For suppose that *all things are lawful to me, all things are not expedient*: And, again, *though all things are lawful to me, I will not be brought under the power of any.*"

St. Paul, you see, does not stay to consider whether the things forbidden to the Corinthians, were *lawful* or not (though possibly they might mistake in that assumption, as licentious or thoughtless people, we know, every day do) but, be this as it may, he insists that he had reason to lay them under some restraint even in *lawful* things, because the practice of such things was inexpedient, in many respects; And because, if all other considerations might be overlooked, it is enough that an unrestrained indulgence in them begets slavish habits, and would, in the end, destroy, or very much impair, their moral freedom.

Of the words, thus far opened, I propose to make this use; to dissuade you from giving a full scope to the pursuit even of innocent pleasures; and that, from the two considerations, expressed in the text:

I. That such devotion of ourselves to them is, on many other accounts, hurtful and improper—*all things are not expedient*:
And

II. That,

II. That, in particular, it violates the dignity of human nature, by taking from us, or weakening to a great degree, that manly authority of reason, that virtuous self-command, which we should always retain, and be in a condition to exert, even in indifferent matters—*I will not be brought under the power of any.*

I. Wealth and prosperity have a natural tendency to alter, that is, in the language of moralists, to *corrupt*, the public manners. Hence it is, that the old english habits of plainness, industry, and frugality are, now, exchanged for those of indulgence, dissipation, and expence. All the elegant accommodations of life have an unusual stress laid upon them; and there seems to be a general effort to advance them all to the last degree of refinement. The superfluous, which we call the fine arts, excite an universal admiration, and administer, in ten thousand ways, to a luxurious, which, again, takes the name of a polite, indulgence. Hence, society, which used to fill only the
vacant

vacant intervals of business, is now become the *business* of life; and yet is found insipid (so insatiable is the love of dissipation) if it be not, further, quickened by amusements. These have multiplied upon us so prodigiously, that they meet us at every turn, and in every shape; nay, are grown so common, that they would almost lose the name of amusements, if every possible art were not employed to give a poignancy to them, and if fashion, after all, more than the pleasure they afford, did not support the credit of them. As the last resource of the weary disappointed mind, we have found means to interest our keenest passions in one species of amusement, which is therefore called, *play*, by way of eminence; and is become the favourite one, because the most violent: just as the hottest cordials succeed to the free use of strong liquors.

In this state of things (a very alarming one, in all views) nothing threatens the utter ruin of the little virtue, that is left among us, so much, as the general persuasion,

suasion, that such pursuits may be indulged to any degree, because they are commonly acknowledged to be *lawful*. Here, then, the distinction of the Apostle comes in very seasonably, and may, one would hope, be pressed on the lovers of pleasure, with some effect. We may question, it seems, the *expediency* of these pursuits, how indifferent soever they be in their own nature; and a little reflection will shew that they are, indeed, *inexpedient*, that is, unprofitable, unadvisable, improper, in a great variety of respects.

I do not suppose, at present, that the expence of them is ruinous to those, who devote themselves to these pleasures (for then they would plainly not be *lawful* to such persons); but consider, if you can afford to pay the price of them ever so well, they take up too much of your time: abundantly too much, if you have any profession to follow, or to prepare yourselves for, as most men have; but too much, if you have not, because

because it might, and should be employed on better things.

Then, of the little time, they leave to yourselves, they disable you, in some degree, for making the proper use. For they dissipate the attention; they relax the nerves of industry and application; they spread a languor over all the faculties, and make the exertion of them, to any valuable purpose, painful at least, if not impossible. We hear it generally observed, that there is a scarcity of able men in all the departments of life. Can it be otherwise, when the vigour of the mind, which should nourish all great and laudable efforts, which is so requisite to push the active powers of invention, or recollection, to their full extent, is wasted on trifles, is checked by frivolous habits, and left to languish under them?

Or say, that you have force of mind enough to elude this so natural effect of dissipation, is it nothing that, by giving your countenance to it, you draw in weaker spirits to make the dangerous experiment?

that

that you help to propagate the enfeebling passion through all quarters, till, from this authorized scene of vanity, the Capital, the contagion spreads (as we see it now does) to the smaller towns, and even to private houses, in the remotest provinces? that you contribute to make respectable I know not what frivolous and worthless arts, and, of course, to multiply the professors of them, to the great discouragement and decay of useful industry? that you hurt the interests of society, by giving an air of importance to the veriest trifles, and by diverting on these the attention, and the passion, that should regularly, and would otherwise, exert themselves on nobler objects?

I might push these questions still further. For I remember what history attests, and what wise men have said, on the chapter of *polite arts and elegant amusements*.

“They tell us, how sad a sign^a of the times it is, when they grow into general repute

^a SIGNA, TABULAS PICTAS, VASA CÆLATA MIRARI—reckoned, by the philosophical historian, among the prognosticks of falling Rome.

among us; that from incessantly indulged appetites (let the object of them be what it will) such an impotence of mind may follow, such a lust of gratification, such an impatience of controuling a predominant fancy, as shall overleap all the fences of discretion and virtue. The dæmon of taste, say they, shall be obeyed, in defiance of every private and public duty, till distress, disgrace, and infamy break in upon us; till we seek the relief of our wants in fraud and rapine, involve the public ruin in our own, and, in the end, rush blindfold, through an extreme of profligacy, to desperation."

To this effect, and in this tone, have some inveighed against our more refined and elegant *amusements*. But I return to what are commonly known by that name: and with respect to these, allow me to say that the life of man is a serious thing^b; so serious, that dissolute, I mean, untempered, continued mirth, or pleasure, is not of a

^b Homo, res sacra. Seneca.

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piece with it^c. Our virtue, our hopes, nay, our present happiness depends on keeping the mind in a firm and steady frame. Whatever encroaches on this manliness of temper, is pernicious, and unchristian.

I will indulge the extreme candour to suppose, that, in a constant round of *lawful* amusements, you do not forget, or intermit your moral and religious duties. But with what spirit are they performed? With disgust, I doubt; but certainly, with indifference. Nor is this the worst. Temptations are to be expected in this life: and in what condition are we to meet them? Nay, we expose ourselves to needless temptation, even in the midst of these *lawful* pleasures; and we bring no power with us, hardly the inclination, to withstand it. The present scene distracts the mind, and fascinates the senses. And,

^c Neque enim ita generati à naturâ sumus, ut ad ludum et jocum facti esse videamur; sed ad severitatem potiùs, et ad quædam studia graviora atque majora.

Cic. Off. L. i. 29.

in this delirium of the whole man, without God in his thought, or heaven in his eye, what wonder if he become the sport, and, almost before he is aware, the victim of every passion !

Still he is not happy in this feverish state : at most, he but forgets himself, for a moment ; and the intervals of his amusement, which, in the nature of things, must be many and long, are filled with disgust and languor. Nay, the very amusement wears out by frequent repetition. And then such a sickliness of mind succeeds, and such a weariness of living on in a too much used and exhausted world, as is insupportable and fatal to him ^d.

You see then there are many good reasons, which shew the inexpediency of prosecuting even *lawful* pleasures with an unrestrained passion. But, if all others were away, there is ONE consideration still behind, and

^d Fastidio illis esse cœpit vita, et ipse mundus ; et subit illud rabidarum deliciarum, QUOUSQUE EADEM ? Seneca, de tranq. anim. c. xi.

of so much weight, that St. Paul scruples not to make a distinct argument of it, and to press it on the Corinthian Christians, as fully decisive of the point in question—*All things are lawful for me: but I WILL NOT BE BROUGHT UNDER THE POWER OF ANY—* And to unfold this argument is what I proposed to myself

2. *Under the second head of this discourse.*

It should be the ambition of every man to preserve the independency of his own mind on all his natural or acquired inclinations. The dignity of his character depends on this supremacy; and his virtue is no longer secure, than while he retains the power, on all occasions, to exert it.

1. The stoical wise man was exposed to much ridicule by taking to himself the name and office of a king. The pretensions were high, no doubt, and the language, something arrogant and ostentatious. But, let the terms, we employ, be what they will, all philosophy, that deserves the name, must agree in this, That to have the

command of himself, is the duty and chief distinction of a wise man *. There is, then, a consistency and harmony in his whole conduct. We naturally respect those, who give this proof of respecting themselves; and we place an entire confidence in the vigour and uniformity of their character.

Again: though the virtue of self-denial shine out to most advantage in the conquest of ardent passions and violent temptations, its use is not inconsiderable in curbing all the lighter fancies. The reason is, that custom prevails insensibly, and reaches farther than we, at first, intended. By humouring the mind in trifles, we teach it to presume on its own importunity; in greater matters: and it will be found a convenient rule, in the management of our passions, as of our children, to refuse a compliance with them, not merely when they ask improper things, but when they ask any thing with impatience.

* SAPIENS, SIBIQUE IMPERIOSUS—are convertible terms in the moral poet.

Even

Even our curiosity, an innocent and useful passion, should be kept within bounds, and not indulged, as we see it is, on every occasion that presents itself to us.

The continence of Scipio has been much and justly applauded. But he went a step too far, in seeing his captive. He triumphed, indeed, over the stronger temptation, but he was not enough on his guard against the weaker: by complying too easily with a frivolous curiosity, he risked the honour of that virtue, which a pagan historian finds so divine in ONE, who was *et juvenis, et cælebs, et victor*^f.

To apply these reflexions to the case before us, It may seem to be a matter of great indifference, whether we indulge an inclination for *lawful* amusements, or not. But the dignity of our character is concerned in keeping a strict hand over our inclinations of every sort: and, if it were only for an exercise of self-government, it

^f Val. Max. IV. 3.

would be worth the while to moderate, that is, frequently to suspend, the use of a favourite, though innocent gratification. To be enslaved by vicious habits, is the ignominy of a little mind : to be superior to all, is the glory of a great one.

2. But, in truth, there is no security in any case, if we let go this *habit* of self-government. One compliance inevitably brings on another ; and, though we set out with the design of stopping at a certain point, we shall almost fatally be carried much farther. We meant to acquiesce in this, confessedly harmless, indulgence : constant use makes it insipid ; and then we venture on one of a suspicious character. Being now on the confines of vice, we are easily pushed into that quarter ; with some doubt and hesitation, at first ; but scruples give way, as the habit strengthens, and all vices being connected with each other, especially all of one sort, we, by degrees, make the trial of all : and thus, from an innocent fancy, or inclination, indulged too freely,
at

at setting out, we slip insensibly, and beside our purpose, into manifest, perhaps universal, dissolution.

So salutary, so divine is the resolution of the Apostle! *All things are lawful for me: but I will not be brought under the power of any.*

To interdict amusements, altogether, to the vivacity of youth, would be severe and cynical. They are abundantly too numerous, at present, and too much frequented: but many of them are supposed to be, and some, without doubt, are, in themselves, *lawful*. Of these, only, I am now speaking: and even of these it must be affirmed, that the unrestrained use of them is *not expedient*; as, for the other reasons suggested to you in this discourse, so chiefly, because it degrades the man, and enslaves him.

To conclude; the safe and manly part is, *to be temperate in all things*²: to make our pleasures, the occasional re-

² 1 Cor. ix. 25.

laxation^b of the mind, and by no means the employment of it: not, perhaps, to affect a total abstinence from them, which the world would account an incivility; but resolutely to forbear all vicious, or but suspected pleasures; and, for the rest, to keep a great deal on this side of what is thought allowable in the use of them.

^b Lude—uti quidem licet; sed, sicut somno et quietibus cæteris, tum cum gravibus ferissque rebus satisfacimus. Cic. Off. L. i. 29.

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Preached July 5, 1772.

MATTH. v. 38, 39, 40, 41.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also: And, if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also: And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

I Suppose, if these words had been found in any book whatsoever, except the Bible, no man of sense could have entertained the least doubt of their meaning.

But,

But, while one sort of readers think they do honour to God's word by taking every precept in the most strict and rigid sense, and another, by the same mode of interpretation, hope to dishonour it, we may expect that, between them, the usual rules of criticism will be very little regarded.

The text refers us to a law of Moses, which established the *jus talionis*, or *right of retaliation*^a. This law, in the main, is consonant to natural equity; was of general use and authority in ancient times; has, with some modification, been adopted by legislators of all times; and was peculiarly fit, or rather necessary, in the Mosaic institute, composed in a very remote age of the world, and addressed to a fierce and barbarous people.

But this, so reasonable law, had undergone a double abuse in our Saviour's time. What was designed, in the hands of the magistrate, to prevent future injury, was construed into an allowance of private

^a Exod. xxi. 24.

and

and personal revenge: And, again, what was calculated to prevent great and outrageous injuries, was pleaded in excuse for avenging every injury. The Jews retaliated, at pleasure, on those that offended them, and for the slightest offence.

Our divine Master, then, without derogating from the law, when administered in due form, and on a suitable occasion, applies himself to correct these so gross perversions of it—I *say unto you, that ye resist not evil*—that is, that ye do not retaliate on the person, that does you an injury, in the way of private revenge; or even of a public suit, for small and trivial injuries.

You see, our Lord's purpose was, to oppose the mild spirit of the Gospel to the rigid letter of the law, or rather to an abusive interpretation of it: And this purpose is declared in three familiar and proverbial sayings, which, together, amount to thus much; “That, when a small or tolerable injury is sustained by any one, either in his person, or property, or liberty, it is far better

better (and was, thenceforward, to be the law of Christians) to endure patiently that injury, or even to risk a repetition of it, than, by retaliating on the aggressor, to perpetuate feuds and quarrels in the world."

That such is the meaning of the text, would appear more evidently, if the injuries specified were, further, considered with an eye to the sentiments and circumstances of the Jewish people. *A blow on the cheek* was, always, an indignity, no doubt; but the sense of it was not inflamed in a Jew by our Gothic notions of honour; though, if it had, the divine Saviour^b would scarce have advised his followers to extinguish it in the blood of a fellow-citizen: the loss of a *vest*^c, or under garment, was easily repaired, or not much felt, in the cheap and warm country of Judæa: and the *compulsion to attend another*^d, on his occasions, was not much resented by a people, that

^b John xviii. 22, 23.

^c χιτών.

^d ἀναγκάζει. See Grotius on the place.

had

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had been familiarised to this usage by their foreign masters.

But, without scrutinizing the expression farther (which, as I said, is of the proverbial cast, and, therefore, not to be taken strictly) it appears certainly, that the rule enjoined is no more than this, "That we are not to act on the old rigid principle of *retaliation*, but rather to exercise a mutual patience and forbearance, in our intercourse with each other, for the sake of charity and peace."

Still, it has been asked, whether this rule be a reasonable one, and whether the conduct, it prescribes, be not likely to do more hurt, than good to mankind?

The ground of this question is laid in the following considerations :

First, that resentment, being a natural passion, was, without doubt, implanted in us for valuable purposes, and that its proper and immediate use is seen in repelling injuries :

Secondly,

Secondly, That to eradicate, or to suppress this movement of nature, is to dispirit mankind, and to effeminate their character; in other words, to make them unfit for the discharge of those offices, which the good of society requires:

Lastly, That this softness of temper is injurious to the individuals, in whom it is found, as it exposes them to many insults, and much ill usage, which the exertion of a quick and spirited resentment would enable them to avoid:

From all which, conclusions are drawn very unfavourable to the doctrine of the text, and to the honour of our divine Master. It will, then, be proper to give the premises a distinct and careful examination. And,

1. *The use of the natural passion of resentment is not superseded by the law of Jesus.* For the legitimate use of this passion is to quicken us in repelling such injuries as would render human life wholly burthenfome and uneasy to us, not of those petty affronts and discourtesies which afflict us much less
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by being dissembled and forgiven, than by being resented and returned. Now Christianity does not require us to renounce the right of nature in repelling injuries of the former class. The law in question, as explained by our Lord himself, does not, we have seen, import thus much : and for the rest, the appeal is open to the principles of nature and common sense—*Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right*^e ? The practice of the Apostles (the best comment on the law) shews, too, that, on certain critical and urgent occasions^f, they scrupled not to take advantage of those principles. So that universally, as it would seem, where the ends of self-preservation, or of pre-pollent public utility, require and justify resistance in other men, there it is left free for Christians, likewise, to *resist evil*; the purpose of their divine legislator being, in this instance, to explain the law of nature,

^e Luke xii. 57.

^f Acts xvi. 37. xxv. 11.

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and to guard it from the abuse of our hasty passions, not to abrogate, or suspend it.

If any case be excepted from the general permission, it is that of *persecution for the sake of his religion*. And possibly this exception was made in the early days of Christianity, to afford a striking proof to the world that this religion owed its success to the divine protection only, and not to the power of men. Accordingly, the command given in that case has an extraordinary, that is, a suitable, promise^g, annexed to it. But the end of God's special providence having been answered, and the prophecies accomplished^h, by the patience of the saints under

^g Matth. v. 11. x. 23. xxvi. 52. From the two last passages we learn, that the Jewish persecutors of Christ and his disciples were reserved for a *special vengeance* of heaven; to be inflicted upon them in no long time, and here predicted, as it seems, to let the disciples know why, in this case, *resistance* was forbidden, God having taken the matter into his own hands.

^h The accomplishment of prophecy is given by Jesus himself as one reason, why he forbade resistance to the Jews—*how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be*, i. e. that the violence of the Jews should prevail? Matth. xxvi. 54.

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the fiery trial of persecution in those days (whence the miraculous establishment of our religion is evinced) it seems allowable to suppose that the Christian world was, thenceforth, in this, as in other instances, to conduct itself by the ordinary rules and principles of human wisdom; provided that the object of that wisdom be necessary *self-defence*, and not dominion, or revenge, which, in all the forms of either, Christianity forbids and reprobates.

But be this as it may, in cases where religion is not concerned, it seems clear that Christians are left at liberty to repel intolerable oppressions by all those means, which human wisdom dictates. And there is no need of drawing the line very exactly between *tolerable* and *intolerable* injuries, because the aggressor, knowing the force of instinctive passion, has reason, always, to fear, that it will begin to operate too soon, rather, than too late.

The apprehension, then, that the proper use of the natural passion, “ *resentment of injuries,*”

"injuries," is likely to be defeated by the patient genius of the Gospel, is weakly entertained: While, on the other hand, every one must see the convenience of putting this fiery sentiment of indignation under some restraint, and of interdicting the exertion of it in cases, to which so violent a remedy is ill and hurtfully applied.

But

II. It is said, that this doctrine of the Gospel tends to *dispirit and effeminate mankind*, and to *render Christians unfit for many offices, which society requires of them*.

What these offices are, one does not readily conceive, since it is allowed that *evil may be resisted*, when it becomes excessive, that is, when it is worth resisting. But, I suppose, the objectors mean, this patient spirit of Christianity damps the vigour with which it is for the interest of men in society that their civil rights should be asserted, or a foreign enemy repelled: they think, in short, it makes *bad citizens*, and *worse soldiers*.

Now

Now to the FORMER charge I reply, that it only tends to check, or prevent, the turbulent, the factious, the seditious spirit of any community (which is surely doing it no hurt) while, at the same time, it allows men to assert their essential civil interests by every reasonable exertion of firmness and courage; nay, inculcates those principles of a disinterested love for mankind, and what is properly called a public spirit, which make it their duty to do so. And they will not do it with the less effect, for waiting till the provocation given appear to all men to be without excuse. *The fury of a patient man*, is almost proverbial: and particularly, in this case, it is to be expected that, when the natural incitement to resistance, long repressed and moderated, comes at length to be authorised by necessity, and quickened by a sense of duty, it will act with a force and constancy, not a little formidable to those, against whom it is directed. There is no danger, then, that *true patriotism*

should suffer by the meek principles of the Gospel of peace.

As to the OTHER charge of their weakening the *military spirit*, it must be owned again, they would render wars less frequent than they now are, and less destructive—forgive Christianity this wrong—but, when the necessity of self-defence (the only justifiable ground of war) is real and instant, I know not, why the Christian prince, or Christian soldier, should want courage, because he had given proof of his equitable forbearance ; or, that either will be likely to do his duty the worse, for knowing that what he does, *is* his duty.

And, if we appeal to fact, it is enough known, that the Christian soldiery have been no disgrace to their profession ; no, not even then, when the unresisting spirit was at its height, I mean, in the early days of our religion. Christians had many good reasons for not being forward to serve in the Roman armies ; but some of them did serve there ; without doubt, when they were released

from such military obligations and observances, as they esteemed idolatrous: Nay, it appears, that the number of Christian soldiers was, on some occasions, considerable: Yet we no where find, that these patient men misbehaved themselves in a day of action; or, that they threw away their swords, when they had said their prayers.

And I give this instance of bravery in the primitive Christians, the rather, because it cannot be imputed to a *fanatic spirit*, which is able, we know, to controul any principles: It cannot, I say, be imputed to a fanatic spirit, because religion was not the object of those wars, in which they were engaged: They were left, then, to the proper influence of their own principles; which at that time had their full effect upon them, and yet did not prevent them from acting with the true spirit of their profession, that is, with a full sense of the duty imposed upon them by their engagements to the state.

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With regard to the *publick*, then, there is no reason to think that our Lord's injunction will disserve it, in any respect.

III. The last, and most plausible objection to the conduct prescribed in the text, is, "That the same spirit, it discovers, is injurious to *individuals*, and only serves to provoke much insult and ill usage, which a quick resentment and return of injuries would prevent."

This is the common plea, and passes with many for a full justification, of that false honour, which predominates in the world, but is equally frivolous with the other pretences, already confuted.

For,

1. It is taken up on a groundless and mistaken notion, that the unfriendly and malevolent passions are the most natural to mankind. On the contrary, man is by nature, kind and generous; proud and vindictive, indeed, if stimulated by ill treatment, but prompted, again, by that very pride to relent at the appearance of gentleness

ness and submission in the party offending; and easily disposed to lay aside the thoughts of revenge, when no obstinate resistance seems to make it necessary. There are, certainly, few persons, at least in civilized life, of so base a temper, as to insult others, and much less to insult them the more, for their gentle inoffensive manners. Or, if such monsters there be, they will soon become detestable in society; while the objects of their unprovoked fury will find an asylum in the general good-will and favour of mankind.

They, therefore, who pretend that the world cannot be kept in order, but by resentment and revenge, will do well to make trial of the opposite conduct, before they have recourse to so boisterous a remedy. They will probably find, that *only by PRIDE cometh contention*ⁱ, and that they have injured their species, in thinking otherwise.

2. Let it be remembered, that the Gospel neither forbids us to take the benefit of the

ⁱ Prov. xiii. 10.

laws in cases, where the injury is considerable, nor to resist, without law, in extreme cases; besides, that our corrupt nature will often get the better of *principle*, I mean, when the provocation is not of that size, as to justify either remedy. Whence it follows, that brutal force and malignity will lie under many restraints, and will rarely be encouraged by the passive temper of a conscientious Christian, to proceed to such lengths, as the objection supposes. But,

3. Lastly, and principally, we should call to mind, that, though some ungenerous dispositions should take advantage of our dissembling smaller injuries, to repeat, or even increase them, till they come at length to the utmost verge of what we call *tolerable* injuries, yet it does not follow, from such inconvenience, that the law is to be accounted inexpedient. For the law has a general end in view, the good of society at large, or of the individual: And the law is a proper one, if the end be commonly
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and for the most part attained by the conduct prescribed, though with some exceptions.

That the lawgiver foresaw the possibility of such exceptions, is clear from the language, employed by him. If a blow *on one cheek* be patiently received, it may be succeeded by a blow *on the other*: if we suffer our *coat* to be taken away, our *cloke* may follow it: and if we make no resistance to the requisition of going *one mile*, we may be compelled to go *two*. The inconvenience, then, is supposed and admitted in the law itself; but it was seen not to be of moment enough to evacuate the law. Generally speaking, it will be better to bear the inconvenience, than to violate the law; better for the injured party himself, but certainly better for society, at large.

We are certain, that the law will operate this effect, because the lawgiver is, by supposition, divine. He, who knew *what was in man*, what his nature, and true interest, is, could not mistake in adapting the

the law to the subject of it. And then, for the *exceptions*, he has it in his power to make amends for those, and to recompense fully, as he engages to do, any sacrifice we make to conscience, acting within the scope and purpose of the law.

So that, on the whole, it is but a just deference to the law, and to the authority of the lawgiver, to abstain from *resisting evil*, according to the true sense and spirit of the command, though, by so doing, we subject ourselves to some, nay to much inconvenience. For he must be slenderly instructed in the school of Christ, who is yet to learn, that greater sacrifices, than these, must be made, if need be, for the sake of *him who died for us*.

Enough, I hope, has been now said, not only to vindicate the sacred text, but to let you see how repugnant the doctrine of it is to that contentious, vindictive, and even sanguinary spirit, which prevails so much among

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among those, who, by a strange abuse of language, call themselves Christians.

The root of this mischief, is, a pride of heart, nourished in us by an ill-directed education, and fostered, through life, by the corrupt customs and maxims of the world. To counteract this inveterate evil, we shall do well to consider who and what we are; weak, infirm, and sinful creatures, who are provoking heaven every day, and should not therefore resent it much, if we receive but little respect from men. We should consider, too, that we are the followers of HIM, who suffered every indignity without deserving any, and yet requires no more from us, than he practised himself, and for our sakes.

Such considerations will make us humble and meek and placable; ready to forgive, as we hope to be forgiven; and disposed to make allowance for those defects in others, which we have so much reason to lament in ourselves.

Still,

Still, if we find the duty, of *not resisting evil*, painful and uneasy to us, let us be careful to avoid the occasions, which require the exercise of it. A prudent Christian (and Christianity excludes not, nay enjoins, prudence) will rarely be put to this trial of his virtue. We bring an insult on ourselves by indiscreet liberties, by offensive actions or rash expressions; and then, rather than retract a folly, we commit a crime.

After all, the most cautious, inoffensive conduct may not exempt us, in every instance, from discourtesies and affronts, from the petulance or injustice of unreasonable men. In this case the authority of our divine master must controul the movements of nature. We must resolve to endure what we dare not resist; and, for the rest, may assure ourselves, that, in giving this proof of our Christian temper and principles, we do what is perfectly fit and right in itself,
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is singularly conducive to the good of society, and, whatever our impatient passions may suggest, will contribute more than any resistance, to our own true enjoyment, even in this world.

SERMON

S E R M O N XVII.

Preached May 14, 1775.

LUKE ix. 26.

Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory and in his Father's, and of the holy Angels.

IF we compare this text with the parallel one of St. Mark ^a, it will seem probable that it more immediately concerned the Jews; who, in consequence of their being *ashamed* of Christ, and rejecting him, as their Messiah, should themselves be covered

^a Ch. viii. 38.

with

with shame, and be rejected by him from being his people, when he came to take vengeance of their crimes in the destruction of Jerusalem. In this view, the words are prophetic of what should, and, in fact, did, befall the *unbelieving Jews* of that age, in which Christ lived; for *before that age was passed, all these things were fulfilled on that adulterous and sinful generation*: were so remarkably fulfilled, that the unbelieving Jews, only, were involved in that calamity, while the Christians, even to a man, as we are told, providentially made their escape from it.

But, though this be the primary sense of the text, we have reason to believe that something further, and still more terrible, was intended by it. For the destruction of Jerusalem was emblematical of that final destruction, which should await all the enemies of Christ in the day of judgement; as we may probably gather from the exaggerated terms in which the prophecy concerning Christ's coming to judge Jerusalem

is delivered, and as we certainly conclude from those passages of scripture, which professedly describe the final day of judgment, when *all that believe not shall be condemned*^b, and concerning which our Lord himself says—*He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word which I have spoken, THE SAME shall judge him in the last day*^c.

Whence, you see, we are authorized to take the words of the text in their full force, and to understand them as a general declaration to ALL, who shall be *ashamed of Christ and of his words*, that of them shall Christ, also, *be ashamed*, in the great day of retribution, sublimely expressed by the circumstance of his *coming in his own glory and in his Father's, and of the holy Angels*.

To be *ashamed of CHRIST*, is very intelligible language, and means to disown him for what he claims to be, The Messiah; and to take it for a degradation to us, a reflection

^b Mark xvi. 16.

^c St. John xii. 48.

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on our own sufficiency and importance, to regard him as our Lord and Saviour. In like manner, to be *ashamed of his words*, is, to think it beneath us to receive his doctrine, and to observe it: It is to say, or to behave ourselves as if we said, with neglect and scorn, that we will not condescend to be influenced and directed by it.

But how, and in what respects, may we be said to incur the guilt of this charge? In what ways, may we testify to the world that the shame of CHRIST and of his WORDS is predominant in us?

The inquiry, you see, is of the last importance; for this *shame* of Christ, in whomsoever it prevails, and so far as it prevails, will be repaid in kind, in that day, when he shall *come in glory*, in that day when it so much concerns us to *have boldness* before him, *in the day of judgement*^a.

To assist you, then, in making this momentous inquiry, permit me to lay before

^a John iv. 17.

you, gradually and distinctly, the CHIEF of those cases, which appear to me to express, or imply, the existence of this *false shame*; and may therefore let us see whether we are, or not, involved in the guilt of it.

I. They (if any such there be) who reject Christianity on the grounds of a fair impartial inquiry, cannot so properly be said to be *ashamed* of Christ, as to be *convinced* that he has no claim to their respect and veneration. For they deny him, they will say, not from a principle of *shame*, or disrespect, but of what they take to be *right reason*.

But then, if any oblique views have influenced their disbelief; if conceit, or vanity, or presumption, has any share in forming their conclusions; if a careless or fastidious neglect of the means, by which they might be better informed, has mixed itself with their inquiries; if they have felt the smallest disposition in themselves to struggle with evidence, or to be concluded by any thing but evidence; if any, or all, of these motives

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motives can be imputed to them, they will find themselves liable, more or less, to the charge of the text; and it surely concerns them to see that they stand clear of all such imputations: It concerns them the more, because, if the revelation be divine, the revealer knew what evidence was fit to be given of it, and that the evidence given was sufficient to the conviction of a reasonable inquirer. To the severe scrutiny of their own hearts, the disbelievers on principle are, therefore, referred: and, *if their heart condemn them* in any degree, let them reflect with awe, that *God is greater than their heart, and knoweth all things*^c.

But, whatever these immaculate unbelievers may have to say for themselves, there are others, who have the spots of *shame* indelibly impressed upon them.

SUCH were the Jews, of old, who rejected Christ, not because they wanted evidence of his mission (for they could not

^c John iii. 20.

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deny, nay they frankly owned, that *he did many miracles^f*, but because he was the *Son of a Carpenter^g*; because he was of *Galilee^h*, and dwelt at *Nazareth*; because their *rulers did not believe in himⁱ*; because they were afraid of being *put out of their synagogue^k*; because *they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God^l*; in plain words, because, on one account or other, they were ASHAMED OF HIM.

SUCH, too, in succeeding times, were many of the pagan wise men, who disbelieved, because the doctrine of the cross was *foolishness* to them^m; because the Jews, who were the first converts to the faith and the first preachers of it, were, in their eyes, a contemptible people; because the vulgar were generally inclined to believe in him;

^f John xi. 47. Acts iv. 16.

^g Mark vi. 3.

^h John vii. 41. i. 46.

ⁱ John vii. 48.

^k John xii. 42.

^l John xii. 43.

^m 1 Cor. i. 23.

because

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because his doctrine contradicted and degraded their philosophy; because their pride of reason would not submit to be tutored by the Galilæan; in a word, for a hundred frivolous reasons, which only shewed, that they were ASHAMED OF HIM.

SUCH, too, in later times (may we affirm without a breach of charity) have been, and are, many of those over-modest men, who know not how to withstand the raillery of prophane scoffers; who think the credit of their parts concerned in rejecting their creed, and applaud themselves for fitting loose to the principles, which they call the prejudices, of their Christian education; who affect to have a religion of their own making, if they have any at all, or, rather, disclaim all regard to religion, on the authority of this or that renowned patriarch of infidelity; to say all, in a word, who have the infirmity, and yet make it a matter of vanity, to be ASHAMED OF JESUS.

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Now,

Now, of such unbelievers it must be said, that they clearly come within the description of the text: they are *ashamed* of the Son of man, and yet, perhaps, *glory in their shame*: to what end, let them reflect, when they read on, and find, that of such *shall the Son of man, in his turn, be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy Angels.*

II. [1.] Of men *professing* Christianity. They are most exposed to the censure of the text, who, under a full conviction that Jesus is the Christ, yet, in words, formally disown and reject him. Such was the Apostle Peter, who *thrice denied* his Lord, though he had not the least doubt of his divine pretensions. And why did he deny him? Because, it lessened him in the eyes of a stranger or two, to have it believed by them, that he was connected with a supposed criminal; because, he had not the confidence to bear up against the reproach of a *maid-servant*, who *looked earnestly upon him, and said, This man was, also, with him,*

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him. Such was the power, which a false shame had upon this great, and otherwise fervent, disciple of Christ! A memorable instance of human frailty, which should admonish believers to be on their guard against all approaches towards a crime, the less pardonable, because committed against the clear sense of the mind, and almost without temptation.

St. Peter, it is true, might alledge the passion of *fear*, as well as *shame*: he probably thought his life in some danger, and had an eye to his personal safety, as well as credit, when he denied his Master. Yet when he reflected on his unworthy conduct, though under these circumstances of alleviation, he *wept bitterly*, as he had reason to do. What then should they feel, who have not this cloke for their shame? who deny their Lord without any inducement to do so, but the weak apprehension of disgusting some persons, whose sentiments after all, they do not really adopt, themselves. Yet is this no uncommon case.

Men

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Men are ashamed to confess with their mouths, what they believe in their hearts; and give themselves airs of a frank libertinism, when they tremble at their own impiety: And all this, to be well with a frivolous circle, which they frequent, or to merit the good word of certain fashionable blasphemers.

[2]. Another sort of men seem to come within the description of the text, who, though neither prompted by a sense of danger to their persons, nor of disgrace to their reputation, are yet induced by a regard to their *interest*, when it presses upon them with a certain force, to dissemble their conviction, or rather openly to avow their shame of Jesus. Such are they, of whom our Lord himself speaks, *who for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away*ⁿ: And such, in particular, was the young man in the Gospel, who had no vice to keep him from believing, nay who would gladly perhaps have sacrificed any thing, but his

ⁿ Luke viii. 13.

fortune,

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fortune, to the Christian faith. It seems, as if he had been upon the point of entering, without reserve, into the service of his new master, when, being told, that he must part with *all he had*, and then *follow him*, he grew sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions°. Poverty was a cross, which this amiable young man was not prepared to *take up*. His faith, which, before, gave a promise of life and vigour, died away at the proposal. He now found, doubtless with some surprise to himself, that he had the seeds of infidelity lurking in him. He could not resolve to give this last proof of his sincerity: he, therefore, withdrew himself from Christ; in other words, he was *ashamed* of him. Let us pity the weakness of this unhappy young man; and only ask ourselves, if, in his circumstances, or in any approaching to them, we should not have hesitated, as he did, about *believing in the*

° Mark x. 17. 23.

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name of the Lord Jesus. If we should, let us implore the divine grace to strengthen our faith, and frankly confess, that a secret principle of *shame*, though skulking behind some other and more venial infirmity, has taken hold of us.

[3]. Still, we may not have gone these lengths of infidelity. We assure ourselves, perhaps, that no consideration would induce us, simply and wholly, to renounce the faith, and that, if the hard alternative was proposed to us, we should rather give up wealth, fame, and life itself, than formally deny our Lord, and disclaim all hopes of interest in him. But let us explore our hearts a little, those *hearts*, which, as we are told and have reason to know, are *deceitful above all things*^p. Have we never in lesser instances detected ourselves approaching somewhat towards this ignominious crime of apostacy?

Have we not contented ourselves with being the disciples of Christ in private, and

^p Jer. xvii. 9.

with

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with *going to him*, as the Ruler of the Jews did, *by night*, in secrecy, and, as it were, by stealth, not to draw the observation of men upon us? Have we been willing and ready to serve him in the congregation, to attend his ordinances, and to revere his sacraments? Have we dared to let the world see that we are not ashamed of the cross of Christ^a? and that we glory in *remembering him*, as we are admonished to do, at his holy table^r? Have we no reluctance to let our friends, nay our servants, know^s that we live in a daily sense of our duty to him, and that we hope for all the blessings of this life and the next, only through his merits and intercession? Have we never heard his pretensions slighted, and his holy name blasphemed, without expressing a becoming zeal for the honour of our Redeemer? Have we testified our displeasure at freedoms of this sort by an open reprehension of them on all fit occasions; at least, by a look and

^a Public Baptism, refused.

^r The Lord's Supper, neglected.

^s Family Prayer, omitted.

manner,

manner, which shewed how offensive they were to us? On the other hand, have we never, in such circumstances, by an assumed air of complacency, seemed to authorize what we secretly disapproved, and to yield our assent to propositions which we inwardly detested? In a word, have we none of us, at any time, given occasion to unbelievers to say or think of us, that we were *almost* inclined to be of their party; or at least, that we had not the zeal, and firmness and resolution, which men ought to have, who profess themselves believers in Jesus?

To these, and other questions of the like sort, it concerns us to think what answers we could honestly make. But of this be we assured: If we have not constantly and uniformly signified, declared, proclaimed our attachment to Christ; if we have not taken care to avoid all irreverence toward our Lord and Master; nay, if we have not been enough upon our guard to let no man suspect us of *indifference* towards him—we certainly have not done our duty; we have
virtually

virtually denied *the Son of Man*; we have, in effect, been *ashamed* of him.

And THUS MUCH may suffice for a commentary on that part of the text, which more immediately respects the PERSON of Jesus Christ—*Whosoever shall be ashamed of ME*—but our Lord goes farther, and says—*Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of MY WORDS—of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed*, in the day of judgement.

Here, then, is a new subject of discourse. I call it a new one; because, though the two topics run into one, and he that is ashamed of Christ's *words*, may not improperly be said to be ashamed of *Christ himself*, yet, for the sake of method, it may be convenient to keep these two points distinct, and to give to each a separate consideration.

It remains, then, to set before you the principal of those ways, on which we may incur the guilt, especially, of being ashamed of our Lord's *words*, that is, his DOCTRINES, and LAWS: a copious and important subject! on which I shall reserve what I have to say

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to another occasion. In the mean time, let us lay to heart what we have now heard concerning the honour due to the PERSON of our great Redeemer. *Be we not, therefore, ashamed of our Lord^t—but let us resolutely abide in him, that when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming^u.*

^t 2 Tim. i. 8.

^u 1 John ii. 28.

SERMON

S E R M O N XVIII.

Preached May 21, 1775.

LUKE ix. 26.

Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of MY WORDS, of him shall the son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy Angels.

THE text distinguishes betwixt *being ashamed of CHRIST*, and *being ashamed of his WORDS*. And, though the two charges, in effect, run into one, yet I have found it convenient, in point of method, to observe that distinction. Considering the subject, in this double view, we shall see more clearly,

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what

what the crime is, which we are here cautioned to avoid, and *when* we are guilty of it.

I have already gone through the first division of the text, and shall now enter on the second. If we have not formally disowned, or, in effect, at least, been *ashamed* of CHRIST, that is, of his name, dignity, and person, and of the relation, which we bear to him, as our SAVIOUR and REDEEMER, yet have we not felt in ourselves, and evidenced to others, something of that disposition in regard to his WORDS, that is, considering him in the light of our LORD and MASTER?

Now, to do justice to this part of our subject, we must consider the *words* of Christ, first, in THEMSELVES, or as composing that form and manner of address, in which he thought fit to deliver himself to us: and, secondly, in the SUBJECT MATTER of them, that is, as comprehending both his *doctrines* and *precepts*, *articles of faith*, and *rules of life*, all that, as our heavenly Instructor, he

requires us to believe, and, as our *lawgiver*, to put in practice. In both respects, I doubt, we shall, many of us, find that we have too much, and too often, been ashamed of Christ's *words*.

I. Under the first consideration of the words themselves, that is, of his *manner* in addressing himself to us, let it be observed, that, though it be true, in several respects, that *never man spake as this man*, yet this commendation must not be extended to the *language* of his discourses, in which no peculiar art or elegance is affected. He condescended to speak, as any other Jew might have done, and as his Apostles afterwards did, plainly and clearly enough to convey his meaning, but not with *the enticing words of man's wisdom*, that is, of men cultivated and polished in the school of Greek or Roman learning. Hence, both in ancient and modern times, such as were, or pretended to be, so accomplished, have not unfrequently objected to the style of the Gospel, as rude, and barbarous, and not

composed with that beauty, which they have been taught to admire in the masters of fine writing. Now, though this pedantry might, perhaps, be excused in an old Pagan sophist, and is naturally enough assumed by a modern classical unbeliever, one is shocked to find it in professed Christians. And yet, I doubt, there are not a few of those, who are *half ashamed* of the Gospel, because not written in the best Greek, or according to the rules of the most approved rhetorick: I doubt, there are even those who might tell us, if they would (as a polite Italian philologist has done) that they read their bible but seldom, lest a familiarity with it should hurt their style; or perhaps abstain from reading it, altogether, because not fashioned according to their ideas of elegant composition.

It would be paying too much respect to this frivolous delicacy, to enter into a formal confutation of it. What I shall say to it is, briefly, this; first, that the style of scripture, though not classical, is by no means destitute

destitute of life and beauty : secondly, that, although it were, where the matter of it concerns us so much, it is childish to lay any great stress on the manner : that, *further*, the very objection turns to the honour of the Gospel, which was purposely so composed that the effect of it, in the conversion of the world, might be seen to flow from supernatural causes, and *that our faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*

To all which I might add, what perhaps is a secret to our polite objectors, that the rules of writing and speaking are more arbitrary than they are taken to be ; that they refer to our customs and manners, and derive their merit from that reference, only ; that, in different times and places, and under different circumstances, the same manner may be good and bad ; and that there is no universal archetype of perfect speech, existing in nature ^a.

^a See Bp. Warburton's DOCTRINE OF GRACE, Ch. ix.

But these minute inquiries are not for this time and place. On whatever principles the style of scripture may be vindicated, or if it cannot be vindicated at all to a fastidious reader, still I affirm, that the taking offence at it is a species of that false shame, which the text condemns, and which deserves condemnation. When the *word of God* is held up to us in the great day, and the inquiry is, what attention we have paid to it, think how poor a subterfuge it will be from the *shame*, that will then overtake us, to reply, in the face of men and angels, that it was not the *word* of Cicero or Plato.

Having dismissed this trifling cavil, let us now see,

II. In the next place, in what respects it may be charged upon us that we have been ashamed of Christ's *words*; that is, of their SUBJECT MATTER; considered in the double view of the *doctrines*, and *precepts*, contained in them.

I. As to the DOCTRINES of Christ, that is, the peculiar articles of Christian faith,
one

one would think that to reject, or question, or explain away these, was inconsistent with the very profession of Christianity. Yet this conduct, in some shape or other, presents itself to us every day, in those who are, or who desire to be thought, Christians; and one cannot but wonder at the pains they take to draw upon themselves this charge of inconsistency.

Some, bolder than the rest, would expunge whole chapters, nay books, from the sacred canon, when the narrative rises above their faith, or the doctrine will not sink to a level with their wisdom; others content themselves with nibbling at single sentences, or, perhaps, words; and, if no obscure manuscript be at hand to favour the system they adopt, take refuge in a forced, unnatural punctuation. How many antient and modern heresies have we seen supported by that presumptuous, or this minute strain of criticism!

Some, again, when the text is not called in question, turn their ingenuity another

Y 4

way,

way, and strike out new modes of interpretation. They mangle and disfigure plain facts, or resolve them into allegories: of this class were those primitive heresiarchs, who maintained that *Christ was not come in the flesh*^b, and that *the Resurrection was past already*^c; and of the same family, too, are those presumptuous moderns, of whatever name, who stumble at the cross of Christ, and sink the doctrine of Redemption in a metaphor.

A third sort excell in puzzling a clear text, in putting a violent construction on artless words, in explaining mysteries by metaphysics, or, to get rid of them at once, in making the plain fishermen of Galilee speak the language of Platonism, or of the Jewish cabbala.

In a word, it would be endless to specify all those, who by studied devices, of various kinds, mutilate, pervert, misinterpret, confound the word of God, obtruding their

^b 1 John iv. 2.

^c 2 Tim. ii. 18.

own sense upon it, and finding any thing there rather than the plain obvious mind of the Revealer.

And why is all this industry employed, these daring liberties taken? Why, to make *Christianity not mysterious*, to shew how reasonable its doctrines are, and to remove all objections against them. The pretence is fair. But shall we then admit nothing in scripture, in that scripture which we call divine, but what we perfectly understand, and can make appear, in all its parts, to harmonize with our systems? Alas, what is this, but to prescribe to the spirit of God; to substitute our wisdom in the place of his; in a word, to be ashamed of Christ's words, and to idolize our own reason.

To give one remarkable instance, out of many, of this false shame. If there be any thing clearly revealed in holy scripture, it is, that there is a world of spirits, good and bad; and, of the last, that there is ONE, placed at the head of them, who sets himself in opposition (as indeed all bad men do) to the
will

will of God; who had a share in seducing our first parents, and still works in the children of disobedience; who was even permitted to tempt Christ, and to possess Judas; in a word, who is styled the *Prince of this world*, and, for the overthrow of whose empire, principally, the Son of God came down from heaven: If I say, there be any clear undisputed point of doctrine in the Gospel, it is this: the whole scheme of Christianity depends upon it: and yet what pains have not been taken to exterminate evil spirits, and disenchant the world of them; although by such methods, as would render language itself of no use, and confound all the rules of just criticism and sober interpretation?

These interpreters, I know, pretend (and many of them, I dare say, with good faith) a zeal for the honour of God, in their attempts of this nature. But let them look deep into themselves. They will, perhaps, find, that they are paying, at the same time, a secret homage to their own understandings,

derstandings, as if the whole of God's moral government lay open to their view, and they were able to pervade every part of it; that they hold a revelation in no esteem, which puzzles their philosophy; and that, therefore, they force a meaning of their own on the words of Christ, because they are inwardly *ashamed* of that, in which his words are most naturally to be taken.

Leaving, then, these rationalists to the scrutiny of their own inmost thoughts, let us inquire,

2. What regard is due to the *words* of Christ, considered not as articles of belief, but *rules of practice*.

And here, I doubt, it must be acknowledged, that we have, all of us, more or less, been *ashamed* of our divine master. For we are convicted of this shame, whenever we disobey his commands, seen and admitted to be *his*, on account of any repugnancy they have to the fashion of the world, and to the consideration we affect to have in it. And who is there, that, in this respect,

respect, can hope to stand clear of all blame, *when he is judged?*

Be meek and lowly of heart, says our Lord. On the contrary, we are proud and arrogant, that we may not be thought to want spirit. *Take no thought for to-morrow,* are the words of Christ: but the world says, be rich and great; and we think of nothing else but *to-morrow*. *Blessed are the pure in heart,* says our spotless preceptor: Are we not *ashamed* of these words, when we had rather run the risk of any defilement, than appear unfashionable? And so in a multitude of other instances.

Still, perhaps, we respect the rule, in some sort, and blame ourselves for the breach of it,

But what shall we say of those, who reject the *word spoken* with a high hand, and offend against it on principle, as we may say, and by system?

Go and sin no more, says our Lord to an adulteress convict; and his words imply a severe censure of having sinned at all, in
that

that instance. But are there none who think this a hard saying, who regard it as a narrow prejudice; who treat the observance of it as a needless scruple; nay, who pique themselves on the violation of it? Are there not some, who delight in this sin by way of preference? who lay it down for a maxim, that this commerce, under certain circumstances, and covered with a certain veil of manners, is allowable, is reputable, is meritorious? Nay, are there not those who would take it ill to be thought incapable of aspiring to that distinction, which, in certain quarters, this commerce supposes?

But let me not enlarge farther on this horrid subject. Consider only, whether the parties concerned must not deride a precept, which they are proud to transgress, and whether, in the saddest sense of the word, they may not be said to be *ashamed* of it.

ANOTHER instance occurs, the mention of which, I am sensible, can be of no farther use than to illustrate my subject. A placability of temper, the forgiveness of injuries,

injuries, the love of our enemies, nothing is more insisted upon in the Gospel, than these virtues, which make the very essence of a Christian's temper. The precepts to this purpose are numberless, and express, and enforced with all possible authority. Yet, to persons, in certain conjunctures, and of a certain rank in the world, it would be an affront, but to remind them of their duty. We know, who it was, that, *when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered, threatened not, but committed himself to him who judgeth righteously*^d. But what then? Neither precept, nor example moves him, who calls himself a man of honour, and is the slave of fashion. He has command enough of himself to assume an air of tranquillity, and to observe all the forms of good-breeding. But his hate is rancorous, his resentment hot as hell, his revenge, immortal. Let his pretences be what they will, his conduct cries aloud to all the world, "I renounce the Gospel, I am

^d 1 Peter ii. 23.

ashamed

ashamed of the meek and merciful religion of Jesus.”

To conclude: We now understand in what ways, and in how many respects, we may be *ashamed of Christ and his words*. In recounting those several ways, whether respecting the name and dignity of our Lord, or the rule of faith and practice, which he has given us, we have seen, at the same time, how little, how base, how ungrateful, how impious, how inexcusable, in all views, this *shame* is: especially in all those, who wear the name, and do not wholly disclaim the faith, of a Christian. More words would be thrown away on those, who are insensible to such considerations. Or, if any further remonstrance can be of use, if there be a motive left that can reach their case, it must be one, that alarms their fears, and shews the danger, the unspeakable hazard, to which they expose themselves by this miserable conduct. And, in the whole extent of God's word, there is not, in the nature of things there cannot be, a more awakening, a more
terrible

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terrible denunciation, than that of the text, which therefore I cannot do better than leave with you in its own proper form, as pronounced by our Lord himself—*Whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy Angels.*

SERMON

S E R M O N X I X.

Preached Jan. 29, 1775.

ST. MATTH. xvi. 18.

I say also unto thee, that thou art PETER, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

THE way of giving a new name to an eminent person, more immediately concerned in any great transaction; a name, expressive of that transaction, and therefore proper to fix and perpetuate the memory of it; this custom, I say, was of known use in the antient world. Thus, when God renewed his covenant with *Abram*, and engaged to multiply him exceed-

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ingly,

ingly, the name of this patriarch was changed to *Abraham*; which name, in the Hebrew language, signifies *the father of a great multitude*^a: and, for a like reason, the patriarch *Jacob* took the name of *Israel*^b; to omit many other instances of this usage, which occur in the sacred scriptures.

Just so, when one of the Apostles, known before by the name of *Simon*, had made a memorable confession of his Master's being *the Christ, the son of the living God*, i. e. the redeemer, the prince of Israel, the Messiah foretold, our blessed Lord, to give weight and emphasis to this confession, confers a new name upon him. For he *answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven*: That is, no man hath revealed this great truth to thee, nor has any interest of man, any thing, indeed, but the spirit of God, influencing thy impartial and well-disposed

^a Gen. xvii. 5.

^b Gen. xxxii. 28.

mind,

mind, prompted thee to entertain and avow it thus heartily and publicly (the proofs of it not being, at present, so strong, as they hereafter shall be): Therefore, to express my approbation of this great testimony to a truth, which is the fundamental article of my religion, and, at the same time, to signify to thee the honour, with which I mean to reward thee for it, *I further say unto thee, Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

The name, *Peter*, signifying a *rock* in the Greek language, implies, we see, the immoveable truth of the confession, here made, on which the Christian religion was to be built; and the immoveable firmness, too, of the Confessor, who should have a share, with the other Apostles, in supporting the whole fabric, and be himself, in point of time, the first stone, on which the glorious superstructure was to be made.

It follows—and *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*—that is, *Death, or De-*

struction (for that, only, the oriental phrase—*the gates of hell*—here signifies^c) shall never prevail against this church, being founded on thee, and the testimony, made by thee, as on a rock of ages, which shall never give way, or be removed.

We see, then, the full meaning of this famous text, which contains, in effect, two prophecies: ONE, respecting the foundation of the Christian church, and (so far as the Apostle Peter was personally concerned in the prediction) then verified, when Peter laid the first stone of this august building in the converts made by him both among the Jews^d and Gentiles^e: the OTHER prophecy, respecting the perpetuity of this church;

^c "Adns, or *death* [see Grotius in loc.] is here personized: and, the gates of cities, being antiently the places of counsel and judgement, as well as their chief defence and strength, hence the *gates of death* are the power and policy, which this person should employ to accomplish his ends: which is, in other words, to say, that those ends, or *destruction*, should by no means, be effected.

^d Acts ii. 14.

^e Acts x. and xv. 7.

which

which the divine providence would, in no future age of the world, permit to be destroyed.

So that, not the supremacy of Peter over the rest of the Apostles (as the church of Rome vainly pretends), but the priority of his claim, in point of time, to signal services in the conversion of mankind, is expressed in this memorable promise made to Peter—*on this rock will I build my church*: and, for the second assurance, here given, and which, to so zealous a master-builder, as our Apostle, must have been singularly welcome—that *the gates of hell should never prevail against it*—we may, now, by the experience of more than seventeen hundred years, understand, how far it has been, and how likely it is, in the full extent of the words, to be, fulfilled.

But, to see a little more distinctly what this experience is, and what presumption arises out of it for the truth of our holy religion, let us call to mind, if you please, the more remarkable of those attacks, which

have been made, at different times, on the church of Christ, and yet how constantly and successfully they have been repelled.

I. No sooner had the foundations of the church been laid on the *rock* of this testimony—that *Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God*—than the storms of persecution arose, and beat violently upon it. Nor was it, indeed, strange, that this new doctrine, published every where, with great boldness, by men who had been eye-witnesses of what they affirmed, and calculated to overturn all the favourite maxims and usages of the world, should meet with the fiercest opposition. And how easy did it seem for that world to crush the infant society, now struggling for life in the hands of twelve poor, illiterate, and friendless men, if the decree of heaven had not gone forth—that *the gates of hell should not prevail against it!*

I know, indeed, that this violence of persecution was, in the end, of advantage to the Christian cause; and, from the nature

ture of the human mind, when once persuaded of any thing, true or false, might be expected to be so. For cruelty, in such cases, only excites an unconquerable firmness and perseverance. But what was persuasion in succeeding converts to the gospel of Christ, was knowledge, or rather the infallible evidence of sense, in the first publishers of it. The Apostles witnessed a matter of fact, when they made known the resurrection of Christ, on which their whole doctrine rested. And it is not in nature for any single man, much less for twelve men, to suffer, and to die, for a false fact, not taken upon trust from others, but asserted on their own proper and personal experience. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, they neither saw, nor felt, nor conversed with him after his resurrection, that is, they had no persuasion for force to harden into obstinacy, but a consciousness of falsehood in their attestation, which could not have

held out against the rage of their persecutors ^f.

If it be said, that criminals are often supposed, and not without reason, to die with a falsehood in their mouths, I answer, it is very possible: but, besides that the Apostles gave no signs, in the rest of their conduct, of a want of principle, by declaring the truth, in this case, they might have saved their lives, whereas a criminal, for the most

^f An antient apologist for Christianity seems to think, that, if a sect of philosophy had been persecuted, as Christianity was, it would presently have vanished out of the world. His words are—*τὴν μὲν φιλοσοφίαν τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν εἰὰν ὁ τυχὼν ἀρχὼν κωλύσῃ, οἷχεται παραχρῆμα*. [Clemens Alexandr. Strom. L. vi. p. 827. Oxon. 1715.] Perhaps, the learned father was mistaken. But a religion, founded on facts, not on opinions, and persecuted from the beginning, could not have supported itself, if those facts had been false. This is the case of Christianity. The subsequent persecutions, when the truth of Christianity was admitted on the credit of the first martyrs, might tend to advance this religion, even though it had been originally an imposture. The difference of the two cases is palpable. The apostles shewed, by their sufferings, that they *knew* what they attested to be a true fact: Succeeding sufferers shewed, that they *believed* it to be so.

part,

part, is but the more likely to lose his, by a true confession.

Or, if, lastly (for suspicion, I am aware, is not easily satisfied, if) the perseverance of the martyred apostles be accounted for from a false point of honour, I admit, that this strange principle sometimes overpowers conviction; but rarely, in any number of men confederated in the same cause, and, least of all, in a number of men of so plain and artless characters, as the Apostles.

On the whole, we have reason to conclude, that, if Christianity had not been true, it must have perished with its first preachers: at least, it cannot be denied, that, in outliving the violence, with which it was assaulted, both by Jew and Gentile, on its appearance in the world, this religion has thus far verified the remarkable prediction of its author.

II. The external peace of the church was scarce settled under Constantine, when internal commotions shook its frame, and with a violence, which was likely to bring on,

on, and that in no long time, its entire dissolution. By these commotions, I mean the heresies, that sprung up in abundance, and distracted the Christian world for several centuries. The zeal, or rather fury, with which these disputes were carried on, was unappeasable; and, if it be true, that *a house divided against itself cannot stand*, there was reason to expect that the household of Christ would exemplify this maxim: While, at the same time, the Christian name was so dishonoured by these contentions, and the lives, as well as the faith, of Christians, so polluted by them, that believers themselves were almost tempted to renounce a profession, which laboured under so much infamy; and the rest of the world could scarce fail to contract an incurable aversion to it.

This, indeed, was so much the case, and the advantage, given to the enemies of our faith, by these scandalous abuses of it, so great, that one is not surprized to find

III. A *third*, and still more alarming danger of the Christian church in the sudden
rise

rise and propagation of the Mahometan religion.

For it was the corruption of Christianity, that gave occasion, or success, at least, to this daring imposture. And now it might seem, that *the gates of hell* were set wide open, and destruction ready to rush upon, and seize, its defenceless prey, the Christian church, disheartened and disabled by its own vices. The uncontrollable spirit of this ruthless sect was, indeed, alarming to the last degree; when a secret providence, first, softened its ferocity, and, then, put a stop to its successes.

I ascribe these effects to the *good providence of God*, watching over the preservation of our holy faith; for what else could make the disciples of Mahomet, tolerant in spite of their ignorance and bigotry; and pacific, when their law breathed nothing but war and universal dominion?

Still the church had other trials to undergo; and *Hell* had yet in reserve some further

further engines of its wrath to employ against her. For

IV. While the African and Asiatic Christians were in danger of a total suppression by the rage of their Ottoman masters, the European had almost as much to apprehend from exhaustless swarms of northern barbarians. And, what darkened the prospect still more, all knowledge and learning had disappeared, during these turbulent ages. Hence, to the destructive fanaticism of the east, was added the grossest *superstition* of the west; which, growing up in a long night of ignorance, and yet directed by policy towards the establishment of a vast and gloomy empire, involved all Christendom in its pestilential shade, and threatened the very extinction of all true religion.

Yet it pleased God, in this distressful state of his church, to provide for its continuance, and even integrity, in due time, by making the cloystered ignorance of the Monks serve to the preservation of the sacred canon; and the enslaving projects of a tyrannical hierarchy,

hierarchy, to the restoration of religious and civil liberty.

And thus, though the powers of *hell* had been successively let loose against the church of Christ in the terrible shapes, first, of Jewish and Gentile persecution; then, of heresy, in the church itself; next, of Mahometan enthusiasm; and, lastly, of Antichristian superstition; yet have they not prevailed against this sacred structure, founded on a *rock*, guarded, as we believe, by heaven itself, and therefore destined to be eternal.

I have touched these several particulars slightly and rapidly, just to put you in mind of what the Christian religion has endured, since its appearance in the world; and to let you see how unlikely it is that this religion should have kept its ground against these various and multiplied attacks, if it had not been divinely protected.

But of all the trials, to which it has been exposed, the greatest by far, if this religion had been an imposture, is ONE, which I have

have not yet mentioned; and that is, *the examination of severe, enlightened Reason.*

And this trial, to complete its honour, our divine faith hath TWICE undergone: *once*, in the very season of its birth; and now, *again*, for two or three centuries, since the revival of letters, in our western world: periods, both of them, distinguished, in the annals of mankind, by a more than common degree of light and knowledge; which must, in the nature of things, have been fatal to any scheme of religion, pretending only to a divine original, and not really so descended.

But this part of the argument is too large, as well as too important, for me to enter upon at present. Let me therefore conclude with a short and interesting reflexion on so much of it, as we have been considering.

It was natural, no doubt, for the author of a new religion, full of his scheme, and impressed with the importance of it, to promise to himself the perpetuity of
his

his work. But a wise man might easily conjecture that a religion, like the Christian, would meet with the fiercest opposition: and, though this be not a proper time to shew it, it might be shewn, that *the spirit of Christ*^a distinctly foresaw the several species of opposition, which his religion had to encounter^b.

Yet, in the face of all these perils, our Lord predicts, in the most direct and positive terms, that his church should brave them all, and subsist for ever. It has subsisted to this day, after encountering such storms of persecution and distress, as must, in all likelihood, have overturned any human fabrick. Is not the true solution of the fact, this, that it was founded on *the word of God, which endureth for ever*^c? The rest, then,

^a 1 Peter i. 11.

^b Of Persecution. John xvi. 2.

Of Heresies. Acts xx. 30. 1 Cor. x. 19.

Of Mahomet's impiety, ix. 1—12. See Mede.

Of the great Apostasy. 2 Thess. ii. &c.

Of these, and other woes still to come. The Revelation, *passim*.

^c 1 Peter i. 25.

follows of course. The wise master-builder (to use his own words on another occasion, near akin to this) *had built his house upon a ROCK : and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house : and it FELL NOT, for it was founded upon a ROCK* ^k.

^k Matth. vii. 24, 25.

SERMON

S E R M O N XX.

Preached Feb. 5, 1775.

ST. MATTH. xvi. 18.

*And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter,
and upon this rock will I build my church,
and the gates of hell shall not prevail
against it.*

THE religion of Jesus hath descended
to us, through two, the most en-
lightened ages of the world. It was, first,
published in the reign of Tiberius: It was
re-published, as we may say, at the Refor-
mation: and is it likely, that an imposture
should have made its way in the *former* of
these periods? Or, is it possible, it should

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A a

still

still keep its ground against the influence of all that light and knowledge, by which the *latter* has been distinguished?

To see what force there is in these questions, permit me to lay before you a slight sketch of the trials, to which Christianity has been exposed from the improved reason of antient and modern times, and of the effect, which those trials appear to have had on the credit and reception of that Religion.

I. Jesus preached the Gospel in the reign of Tiberius: that is, in a time of profound peace, when arts and letters were generally diffused through the Roman empire; and in Judea, at that time a Roman province. So far was this thing from being *done in a corner*^a!

This religion, on its first appearance in the world, had therefore to encounter two sorts of men, well qualified, and not less disposed, to give it a severe examination; I

^a Acts xxvi. 26.

mean,

mean, the learned JEWS, on the one hand, and the reasoning GENTILES, on the other. Yet it prevailed against all the efforts of both.

It was, first, proposed to the JEWS, and its pretensions were to be tried by the correspondence of its principles and history to the doctrine and predictions of their sacred books. That vastly the greater part of the Jewish nation resisted the evidence of that appeal, is well known: but that great numbers did not, and, of these, that some, at least, were of principal note for their rank, and knowledge in the scriptures, is equally certain and allowed; with this further concession, that the evidence, whatever it was, prevailed over the most inveterate prejudices, that ever possessed any people, and the most alarming difficulties and discouragements, to which human nature can be exposed. Let the fact, then, be considered, with all its circumstances, on both sides. And as to the merit of the argument, we are well able to judge of it.

The sacred writings of the Jews, to which the appeal lay, are in all hands: and with what triumphant superiority the followers of Jesus reasoned from them, we see, in their numerous works, still extant, and especially in those of the great Apostle, St. Paul. So that, if all the scriptural learning, and all the bigotry of Judaism, could not stop the progress of Christianity, as we know it did not, it may fairly be presumed, that the way of inquiry was not unfavourable to the new religion, and that truth and reason were on that side. But

II. From the Jews, let us turn to the GENTILES, at that time flourishing in arts and letters. To them was the Gospel preached by the Apostles, and especially by their Apostle, St. Paul, through the whole extent of the Roman empire; and not without success in the head quarters of Gentilism, in the chief towns of Asia, in Greece, at Athens, and even at Rome itself.

The

The pride of Gentile wisdom, indeed, kept its professors, for some time, from taking more than a superficial notice of the new religion. But its rapid progress among the people, joined to its declared purpose of prescribing to the general faith of mankind, broke through this real or affected indifference, roused, at length, the attention of the great and wise, and provoked the zeal of both to shew itself in every mode of opposition. The great persecuted, and the wise reasoned; and this latter species of hostility (the more alarming of the two, if Christianity had been an imposture) was carried on with vigour, and without intermission (whatever intervals there might be of the *former*) through several successive ages. The four Gospels, and the other authentic documents of our religion, were now in all hands, when this lettered war commenced against Christianity, and continued, till paganism was utterly overthrown and subdued. Many adversaries of the Christian name engaged in this unequal contest: but

the most distinguished are, CELSUS, in the second century; PORPHYRY, in the third; and JULIAN, in the fourth: all of them, eminent philosophers; and the last of this great triumvirate, an imperial one. The two first wrote with all freedom, because against a persecuted, and on the side of the predominant, religion; and the third had the whole power of the state in his own hands.

The works of these great chieftains of infidelity, it must be owned, are not extant in their proper form. But Celsus is almost entire in Origen; a great part of Julian may be seen in Cyril; and considerable fragments of Porphyry's work have been preserved in Jerom and other old writers.

Ye do not expect me to produce, on this occasion, the substance of what these three philosophers have said against the Christian cause. Any that will, may see it in the original authors, just mentioned, or in many modern collections, that have been made out of them. It may be enough to say, that those, who give themselves this trouble,

will find much abuse and misrepresentation, and some argument : but the last so weak, and inconclusive, that one cannot wonder much at what Chrysostom tells us, “ That
 “ the early books, written against Christia-
 “ nity, soon fell into a general contempt ;
 “ that they perished almost as fast as they
 “ appeared ; and that, if they still subsisted
 “ any where, it was, because they had been
 “ preserved by the Christians themselves ^b.”

But, setting aside, for the present, the merits of the question, the fact^c; we know, is, that all the efforts of Greek and Roman philosophy were not successful : that the

^b Τοσούτος ἐστὶ τῶν ὑπ’ αὐτῶν γεγραμμένων ὁ γέλως, ὥς ἐ ἀφανισθῆναι καὶ τὰ βιβλία πάσαι, καὶ ἅμα τῇ δειχθῆναι, καὶ ἀπολέσθαι τὰ πολλά. Εἰ δὲ περὶ καὶ εὐρεθείη διασωθῆν, παρὰ Χριστιανοῖς τὸ σωζόμενον εὖροι τις ἄν.

Tom. II. p. 539. Ed. Bened.

^c “ The Christian religion,” says the finest of our English writers, whom I need not therefore stay to name, “ made its way through paganism with an
 “ amazing progress and activity. Its victories were the
 “ victories of reason, unassisted by the force of human
 “ power, and as gentle as the triumphs of light over
 “ darkness.”

church was soon filled with its professors, even before the empire became Christian: and that this great event itself happened within little more than three centuries from the birth of Christ. *So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed,* notwithstanding the severity, with which its pretensions were tried.

It will be said, however, “ that the argument, drawn from the success of Christianity, is not altogether so convincing, as we pretend: that, for a time, the learned heathens paid but little attention to the new sect; that, when it had taken such root among the people as to become the general subject of inquiry, learning was now very much on the decline; that barbarism had prevailed to a great degree before the days of Constantine, and then increased so fast, especially after the irruption of the northern nations, as to leave no traces, almost, of light and knowledge; and that to this sottish state of ignorance, and, its usual attendant, credulity, which continued through many
ages,

ages, the widely extended and permanent establishments of Christianity are, therefore, most probably to be ascribed."

Now, though I cannot assent to what is here alledged, or insinuated, that the adversaries of Christianity wanted either time, or light, or zeal enough to discredit its pretensions, if the way of reason and disputation could have done it, before that long night of ignorance came on which is supposed to be so favourable to religious imposture; yet I will not deny that taste and literature were degenerating in the Roman empire, from the time that learned pagans began to interest themselves in the controversy with the Christians; and that, therefore, had the last only prevailed through this period of declining letters, something would have been wanting to the force and integrity of that argument, which infers the truth of their cause, from its success. But the fact is, that the event has been the same, in opposite circumstances; as I shall now shew,

II. Under

II. Under the SECOND head of this discourse; in which I proposed to point out to you, very briefly, the influence of REVIVING, AND REVIVED letters on the credit and reception of the Christian faith.

From the middle of the 14th century, and even earlier, there were some efforts made to break through that gloom of ignorance and superstition, which had so long overspread the Christian world; and, before the end of it, it was visible enough that these efforts would, in no long time, be attended with success. Accordingly, a zeal for true and antient literature made its way through most parts of Europe, and with so rapid a progress, that multitudes of able men arose within the compass of the next century, and were enough instructed to assist in the reformation of religion, which followed in the commencement of the 16th. From that time to the present, arts and letters have been studied with unceasing application; and all the powers of reason put forth in the cultivation of knowledge, in the
discovery

discovery of error, and the search of truth, It is pretended, that we are now enlightened beyond the example of all former ages: it is credible, that, in some places, where liberty has attended the pursuits of learning, the utmost ability of the human mind, on the most important objects of science, has been exerted and displayed.

Now, amidst this blaze of light, gradually ascending from the dawn of science to its meridian lustre, what has been the fortune of the divine religion, we profess? It has been the first, and last object of attention. It has been examined with the most suspicious and sceptical curiosity. It has stood the attacks of wit, of learning, of philosophy; and, sometimes, of all these acting in concert, without any restraint or reserve whatsoever. Yet it keeps its ground; or rather the belief of it is entertained, not only by the multitude, but, more firmly, than ever, by the ablest and wisest men.

For the truth of this assertion, I can only refer you to your own fair and candid observation;

observation; the proof of it being much too long to be given, at this time. For it would require me to set before you the several topics of argument, which have been employed against Christianity, and the futility of them. It would, further, oblige me to make appear, that the number of those, who still embrace Christianity, is not only vastly greater, but their names, too, beyond comparison, more respectable, than of those who reject it: all which it would be tedious, indeed, but not difficult to shew.

However, till some such proof be produced, ye will be apt, I know, to remind me of many eminent persons, who have been the declared enemies of our religion: ye will object to me the complaints, which even divines make, of an overflowing infidelity in the present times.

In abatement of this prejudice, I could say with much truth, that the character of these eminent persons has been raised too high; and that those complaints, though

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not without foundation, have been carried too far. But I have other, and more momentous considerations to suggest to you, on this subject.

At the revival of letters, when the manifold corruptions of Christianity had been discovered, it was too natural for the disabused mind to entertain some suspicions of the revelation itself; and when reason, now emancipated from authority, had tried its strength, and found itself able to detect innumerable errors in religion and science, it too hastily concluded that there was no subject too vast for its comprehension, and that its power and right to decide on all questions whatsoever was evident and beyond dispute. From that suspicious, and this delirious state of the human mind, infidelity sprung up, and on either stock it still grows. “We have been deceived in many things, with regard to this religion; therefore in every thing.” “We know much; therefore we are capable of knowing all things.”—These, as extravagant as they appear, are the

the two sophisms, into which all modern free-thinking is to be resolved.

But now it is so evident to men of sense, that "a revelation may be true, though much imposture has been grafted upon it, and that its doctrines may challenge our belief, though they be not within the reach of our knowledge:" This, I say, is now so uncontroverted among men of sense, that, if the list of those, who, in the course of two or three centuries, have supported the infidel cause on those grounds, were ever so great or so conspicuous, it could furnish no argument, or even presumption, in favour of that cause itself.

But the truth is, that list is neither formidable for its numbers, nor for the capacity of those, of whom it consists. It shrinks into nothing, when we oppose to it the multitudes of able men, who have been, during this period, and are, the advocates of Christianity; and, among these, when we recollect the names of Grotius, Pascal, Bacon, Locke, Boyle, Newton, and many others

others (not of the sacred order, though I know not why the authority of these should be left out of the account); when, I say, we look up to these great lights and ornaments of the Christian world.

Nor let it be surmized, that the reasonings of infidel writers have been better, or other, than they are here represented to be, or that they have not been enforced with full liberty, and in all their strength. What the liberty, or rather licence, of these enlightened times has been, we all know: And of their arguments, ye may all judge: though this labour be the less necessary, as most of them have not only been triumphantly confuted by believers, but successively exploded by unbelievers themselves; and the rest of them, have not prevented men of thought and ability from being generally on the side of the Christian religion, even to this day.

Ye see, I am as concise as possible, and omit very much of what might be said on this subject, not to exceed the limits usually prescribed

prescribed to a discourse in this place. But when ye contemplate the present state of Christianity, in an age of the greatest light and freedom, and the respect that is still paid to it, I must just desire you to call to mind the state of pagan religion under the like circumstances; and to reflect that, when men of sense examined its pretensions in the Augustan age, there was not a single person, in the priesthood or out of it, of ability and learning, who did not see and know that the whole was a manifest imposture, and destitute of all evidence, that could induce a well grounded and rational assent^d. Can any thing like this be said, or even suspected, of the Christian faith?

I know, that fraud and falsehood, by being mixed with a great deal of acknowledged evident truth, may obtain

^d This effect of inquiry upon the Gentile religions was foreseen by men of sense—*Non sunt ista* [the traditional tales of the heathen Gods] *vulgo disputanda, ne susceptas publicè religiones disputatio talis extinguat.* Cic. Frag. Olivet. T. iii. p. 586.

respect

respect even with some acute and inquisitive men ; as, without doubt, has been the case of Popery, since the Reformation : I know, too, that a false religion, unsupported by any truth, may even keep its ground in a learned age, when restraint or other causes have prevented a free inquiry into that religion ; as may have been the case of Mahometanism, in one stage of the Saracen empire : but that a religion, like the Christian, as delivered in the Scriptures, which must either be wholly false, or wholly true, and has been scrutinized with the utmost freedom and severity, should yet, if the arguments for it were weak and fallacious, maintain its credit, and subsist in the belief of the most capable and accomplished reasoners, is, I think, a prodigy, which never has appeared, or can appear among men.

I suppose, enough has been, now, said to shew, that, in fact, the knowledge of past or present times has not discredited the cause

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of Christianity; and that what there is of infidelity may be well accounted for from certain prevailing prejudices, which unhappily sprung up with returning Letters, at the Reformation. I might go on to shew, that the evidences of the Christian religion, as drawn out, and set before us, by its modern apologists, are now stronger, and more convincing, than they ever were in any former period; and that, on the whole, this religion has not lost, but gained infinitely, by all the inquiries, which improved science has enabled men of leisure and curiosity to make into it. But it is time to return to the TEXT, and to conclude this commentary upon it, with one or two short reflexions.

FIRST, if it be true, that after so many trials of every kind, those especially of reason, and philosophy, to which, the religion of the Gospel has been exposed, the belief of it remains unshaken in the minds of men, Then is the prophecy of the text thus far
signally

signally verified ; and it is indisputable, that *the gates of hell have not, hitherto, prevailed against it.*

SECONDLY, if it be scarce imaginable that any future trials, from without, should be more severe, than those which Christianity has already suffered ; or that those, from within, I mean the trials of severe rational inquiry, should be more formidable, than what it has undergone in two periods, the most distinguished, for the free exertion of the human faculties, of any that have occurred in the history of the world ; then may it seem credible, or rather then is the presumption strong and cogent, that neither, hereafter, will the prophecy be confuted, and that the *gates of hell shall not, at any time, or at all, prevail against it.*

THIRDLY, and lastly, We may learn, from both these conclusions, to put our trust in this impregnable fortress of our Religion ; to embrace with steadfastness, and to observe with the utmost reverence, a RULE OF FAITH AND
LIFE

LIFE, which bears the signatures of immortality upon it, and appears to be under the special protection, as it proceeded originally from the special favour and authority, of God himself,

THE END OF THE THIRD VOLUME,



